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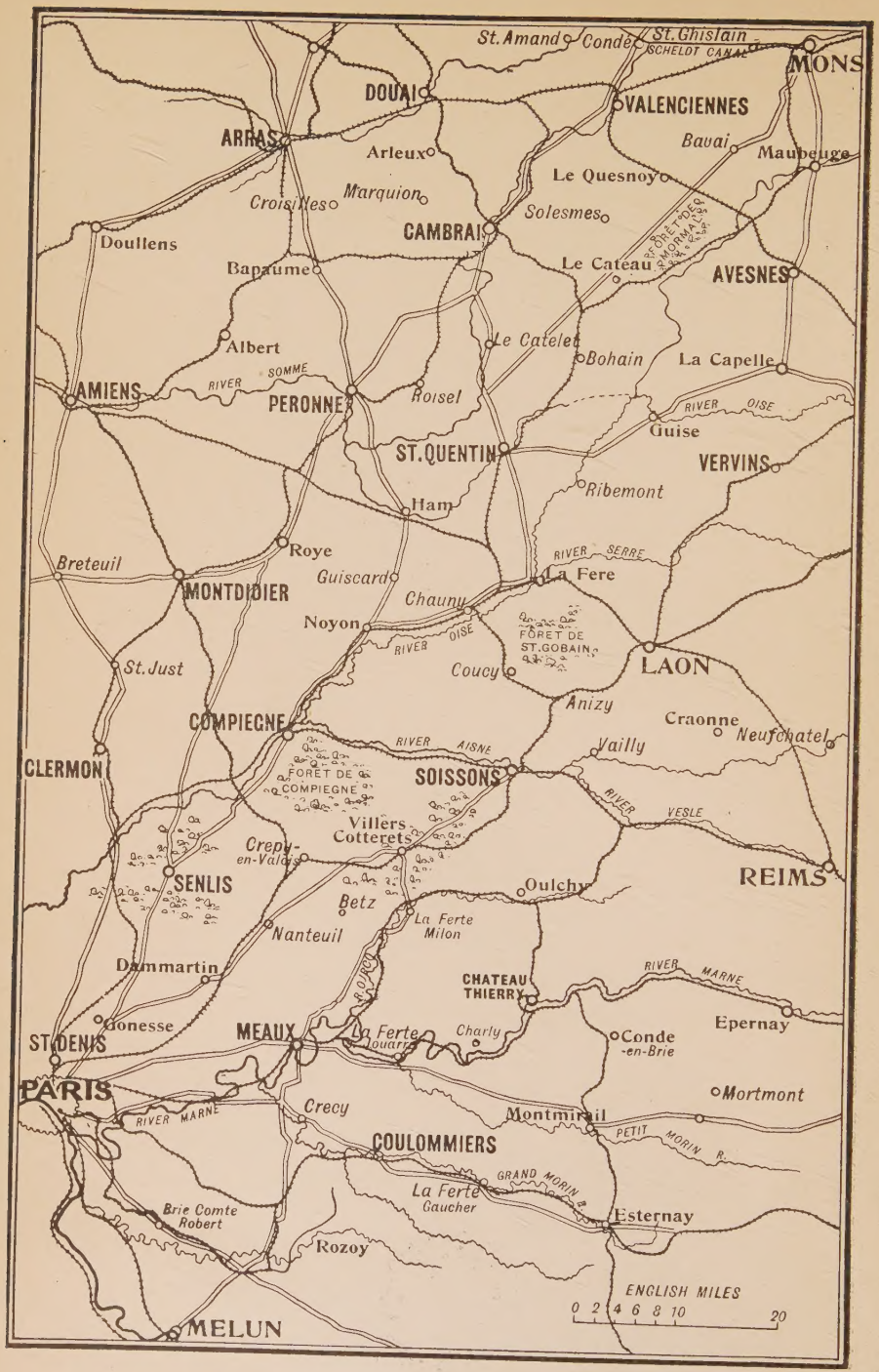


MONS TO THE SOUTH-EAST OF PARIS.

# THE GREAT WAR AND THE R.A.M.C.

BY

Bt. Lt.-Col. F. S. BRERETON, R.A.M.C.

WITH 9 MAPS, 1 PLAN AND 2 APPENDICES

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# PREFACE

TO THE

## FIRST VOLUME OF THE POPULAR MEDICAL HISTORY OF THE WAR

In compiling this History of the War, Lt.-Col. Brereton puts forward, in a popular form, a record of the work of the British Army Medical Services during this great world-conflict. In order that his account may be strictly accurate, official documents, diaries, etc., have been placed at Lt.-Col. Brereton's disposal.

The Army Medical Service made immense strides towards efficiency in the years succeeding the South African War. Those who were at that time responsible for its organisation profited by the experience gained, and took steps to improve the organisation of the medical service as it then existed.

The newly organised service entered the field at Mons, and at once was subjected to the most severe ordeal which the medical service of an army can undergo, namely, a rapid retreat necessitated by the overwhelming numerical superiority of the enemy.

That the service emerged from this ordeal somewhat shaken as to its organisation is perhaps not to be wondered at, considering all the circumstances. But it rapidly revived. Its energies, far from being diminished, were increased as the Marne operations drew to their finish, and during the Aisne, with which the final chapters of

this volume are concerned, it had recovered itself completely, and the soundness of its new organisation was fully demonstrated.

Its difficulties, its dangers, its successes, and its failures are set forth with frankness and with accuracy, and the narrative, so far as it goes, will give some indication to the general public of the problems encountered by a medical service under war conditions, of the methods adopted in dealing with sick and wounded, and of the devotion called for on the part of every member of the R.A.M.C., whether officer or man, in the performance of his duties.

T. H. J. C. GOODWIN, D.G.A.M.S.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

In presenting this narrative of the doings of the Royal Army Medical Corps on the Western Front during the first two months of the Great War, I should like to express my grateful thanks to numbers of the officers of that corps, whose careful notes taken at times of great pressure, and written often under stress and danger, have enabled me to set down what I hope will be considered a fair description of events.

In particular I would thank the present Director-General of Medical Services, Lieut.-General Sir T. H. J. C. Goodwin, and Lieutenant H. Robinson, R.A.M.C. The latter's private diary, which he very generously placed at my disposal, has provided an abundance of material and has given numerous local touches, which help to recall the days of Mons, the Marne, and the Aisne. I would also like to place on record my grateful thanks for the great assistance which Captain Atkinson, the military historian, has given me in reading through and checking these pages.

## GENERAL NOTE

In compiling this volume it has been thought advisable in mentioning officers and non-commissioned ranks of the Medical Service to quote their rank as it was in 1914, and to omit all mention of honours or decorations then held. The hard work of the Medical Service has very properly gained for it during the course of the war numerous distinctions, and to have recorded them all accurately would have meant constant revision. The Author asks the indulgence of those concerned in thus treating the question.

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# CHAPTER I

The care of our sick and wounded—Reorganisation of the Army Medical Service—The cult of disease prevention—Higher education and increased scientific knowledge—Medical units in the field—Dominion and Colonial Medical Services—The Indian Medical Service—The Territorial Force and its Medical Service—The Nursing Service.

Now that the Great War has happily come to an end by the signing of an armistice, and peace is once more with us, the question of the innumerable sick and wounded of the war—the wreckage of this world-wide conflict—may well attract the attention of the people of an Empire too busy during the past four over-strenuous years to do more than satisfy themselves that all was well in that direction. One may, in fact, venture the statement that—a few exceptions admitted—the non-combatants of the British Empire have been satisfied with the care and skill bestowed upon brothers and sons and husbands and their mankind generally. From the earliest days following August 1914 it became increasingly clear that the Army Medical Service, known on many a front as the Royal Army Medical Corps, had, like the magnificent soldiers of the "Contemptible Army," which won immortal honours at Mons, on the Marne and the Aisne, marched to the conflict fully equipped and prepared for any emergency, as fully trained and ready indeed as any battalion of Marshal French's army. It was obvious, too, as the months sped by and our armies expanded, that the R.A.M.C. had likewise increased in proportions. Indeed, this is a fact well known to large numbers, seeing that thousands of men and women helpers have been drawn into the work of tending sick and wounded.

To the general public, then, it has been clear from the very commencement of the war that the R.A.M.C. was ready for the work expected of it, and that as the conflict spread, and our armies gathered, till hosts of men were locked in deadly warfare in France and elsewhere, the medical service grappled adequately with the increased task thrown upon it so that, though the number of helpless soldiers was now vastly increased, the work of caring for them went on smoothly.

But the intimate tale of the mobilising of the whole of the medical profession has yet to be told. That general mobilisation began, we may say, with the actual declaration of war, and progressed till there was scarcely a man or a woman devoted to the noble art of healing who was not a busy factor in the general scheme organised for the care of sailors and soldiers. With all those members of the profession there has been associated a mighty army of men and women workers, the rank and file of the R.A.M.C., nursing sisters, drivers of motor ambulances, women orderlies, cooks, scullions, organisers of this and of that to benefit the wounded, the members of the two societies—the British Red Cross Society and the Order of St. John: a hundred others whom one can find no space to mention. The whole of this mighty band has been pressed into the one service, that for the care of our sick and wounded, a service controlled in the main by the Director-General of the Army Medical Service, by Sir Arthur Stanley, and others, and helped on by the able and willing assistance of a host of individuals.

In their turn, and as occasion arises, each one of these helpers will appear in this narrative of the R.A.M.C., for without them all the R.A.M.C. would have been helpless. Perhaps no body of men and women is more conscious of this than is the medical profession. It has had a gigantic problem to face. Its existence during the years of the war has indeed been that of continually facing and mastering new problems, and it is well aware that alone, unaided, without the ready and generous

help of all parties it would have succumbed beneath the strain, to its eternal chagrin and to the detriment of its patients.

Having stated as much, it becomes necessary to add that the officers and non-commissioned ranks of the original R.A.M.C. as generously subscribe their indebtedness to their brothers of the profession and to the hundreds of men who joined the corps and stood by them. The tale of their doings will be unfolded as the narrative progresses.

It may be of advantage to trace the origin and growth of the Army Medical Service. In olden times the care of the sick and wounded was a more or less haphazard arrangement. In the days of the Crimea, though the organisation had improved considerably, it was found lamentably wanting. Even in our more recent war in South Africa the medical service failed to ward off that scourge of all armies, to wit, enteric fever, so that thousands of our soldiers succumbed. But this, of itself, did not indicate that the Army Medical Service of that date was defective as to its organisation. It pointed rather to a lack of knowledge—a lack of knowledge, be it noted, not confined to the Army Medical Service, but spread throughout the ranks of the medical profession, whether British or foreign. In point of fact, the science of preventive medicine had not yet sufficiently advanced to achieve even a twentieth part of the results made possible by continuous research work, and further knowledge the outcome in recent years of the labours of our foremost scientists. In 1898 Sir Almroth Wright had already introduced his anti-typhoid vaccine. Yet enteric raged in our armies in South Africa. In 1914 onward inoculation against enteric was far more widely practised—indeed, nearly 100 per cent of our soldiers were inoculated—but, and this is the all-important point, putting aside any improvement in the vaccine now in use, and its efficacy may well have increased, the knowledge of the profession and of the medical service has so improved and advanced during

the interval that to the preventive action of inoculation has been added other preventive measures of equal importance.

Speaking generally, infection depends on dosage. Inoculation protects the individual against casual infection from, let us say, a draught of contaminated water. But it is doubtful whether mere inoculation gives immunity where disease germs themselves are allowed to thrive without interference. It is because modern science—the science of hygiene and sanitation generally—has so greatly advanced in knowledge, thanks to the microscope and the laboratory, that disease germs can be detected on appearance, that their spread, their growth can be abruptly checked and their existence ended. More than that, scientific investigation has enabled modern exponents of the science of hygiene and sanitation to acquire vital information as to the natural habitat of disease germs, and having done that has made their destruction a matter of certainty. In the South African War this knowledge was practically non-existent. Sanitary sections specially designed to attack disease had not been organised, and no specialists in disease prevention accompanied the troops. Add to this the fact that enteric inoculation was decidedly incomplete and haphazard. Its very complete use in this war and the immunity it has given has been enormously reinforced by an active sanitary service, to which much of the credit for our immunity from enteric is due and to which may also be directly ascribed immunity from other disease epidemics. Specialists in the destruction of flies—disease carriers *par excellence*—have given wonderful help in the whole scheme of preventive medicine. Such officers, like the sanitary sections, were undreamt of in 1900.

Take a case to aid the above description. A soldier is admitted to hospital with definite symptoms of enteric fever. His is the sole case in that area, where, as elsewhere, water-duty men and sanitary companies have continuously kept watch on the water supplies and on

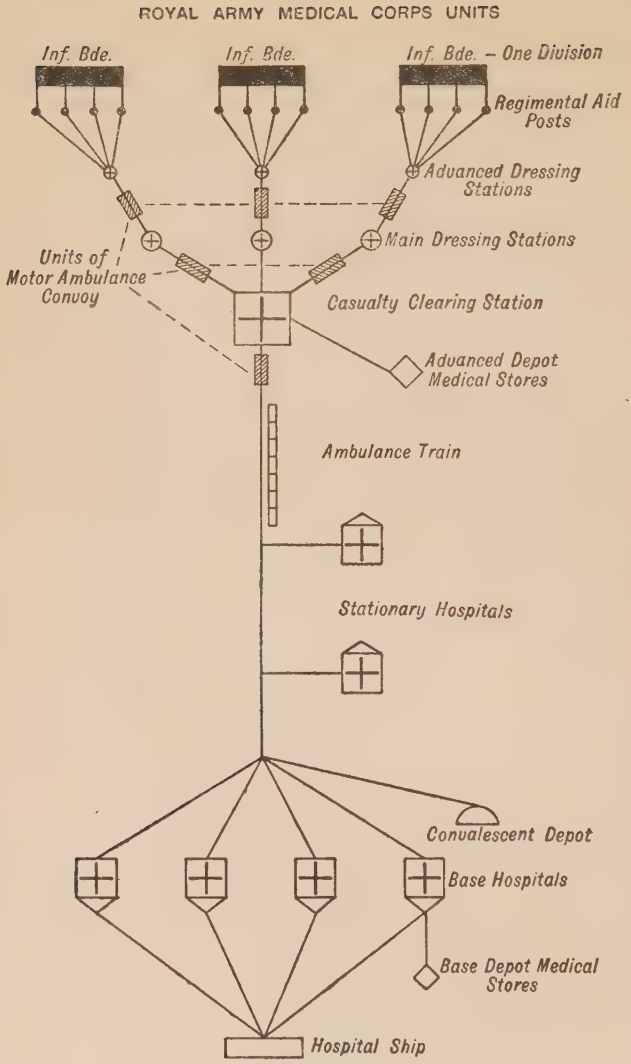
the general sanitation. He is closely questioned. Yes, he remembers entering and drinking beer at a little estaminet in some half-wrecked village behind the line, an estaminet long since placed out of bounds. A sample of beer from the place is at once sent to the Army Medical Hygiene Laboratory. It discloses the germs of enteric. A further investigation discovers the source of the water which diluted this home-made beverage. It too is infected. Instantly the sanitary men pounce upon it and chlorinate it, while the estaminet is more distinctly put out of bounds. But for the laboratory and the system more infected beer might have been sold surreptitiously to our soldiers, more enteric cases would have appeared, and a dangerous epidemic have been launched in the army.

The policy of the new Army Medical Service has been therefore the intensive training of its officers and men, the former in particular. From the days of the Boer War they have been encouraged to specialise, some as surgeons, others as physicians, and others again taking preventive medicine as their own particular sphere. The actual treatment of sick and wounded would appear to the lay mind to be the ultimate object of any medical service. This it undoubtedly is, but prevention of disease, the protection of an army is infinitely the more valuable and important service. Less spectacular perhaps, it yet saves more lives to the nation than ever did the efforts of surgeon and physician. This is a fact which the Japanese Medical Service taught us, for in its war with Russia its success in arresting disease was nothing less than marvellous—marvellous as it appeared then—yet that success was as nothing compared with the results achieved by preventive medicine in this so lately ended Armageddon. Those results have been phenomenal. They have been achieved not by good fortune, but solely and simply because of improved knowledge and because of adequate training whereby that improved knowledge could be made of the utmost use.

It will have been gathered that the new Army Medical Service was a vast improvement on the old, not so much in organisation, as in methods and learning, in the main relating to disease prevention. But side by side with the intensive training of a proportion of its officers the service had greatly improved in organisation also. After the South African War it had passed into the hands of an organiser sufficiently enlightened to pursue modern ideas, and sufficiently enthusiastic and courageous to insist on their incorporation in the service of which he now was the Director-General.

The Army Medical Service owes a great deal to Sir Alfred Keogh, and with him Lord Haldane's name should be mentioned. For the latter supported Sir Alfred Keogh in his efforts to remodel and to fully educate the medical service, and without the intelligent and instructed support of the Secretary of State for War such sweeping changes as were brought about would certainly not have been possible, or would have taken many years to come into being. As it was the Army Medical Service took on a new lease of life, renewed its equipment, and became a well-organised and a distinctly scientific body.

Like the troops destined to meet the Germans, its units were frequently practised at manœuvres, so that when the war began the medical service was as fit to take the field as was any other. Its units, taken in their order from Front to Base, comprised a regimental medical officer, supported by certain water-duty men of the R.A.M.C., who were attached to the same battalion, and by bearers, selected from amongst men of the particular battalion and trained in first-aid work. Immediately behind came the Field Ambulance—a mobile unit provided with bearers and nursing orderlies, and equipped with horse ambulance wagons, of which there will be occasion to speak further. In the case of the cavalry, specially mobile units known as Cavalry Field Ambulances, more lightly equipped, were provided. Passing still farther back, there came a new unit, the




R.A.M.C. FORMATIONS.

Casualty Clearing Station, to which the field ambulances were to pass sick and wounded, and which again, having operated where necessary and given further treatment, were to evacuate their cases at the first possible moment to another unit on the lines of communication.

Be it understood, the Royal Army Medical Corps provided in these three units essentially mobile bodies, intended to march with and accompany troops, and to be always in close contact with them, and though in degree as they went backward from the front those units lost something of their mobility—for naturally enough, whereas a regimental medical officer needed but small equipment and travelled light, a field ambulance was more liberally equipped, while a casualty clearing station carried a mass of material, such as marquees and other equipment, which rendered its mobility only relative compared with the field ambulances—still, mobile they were, and, as events have proved, all three have done most valuable service.

Again, moving backward down the lines of communication, we get stationary and general hospitals and special hospitals for the treatment of special cases, these latter hospitals, it should be noted, an outcome of this war. There are depôts in advance for the supply of drugs and dressings, called Advanced Depôts of Medical Stores, and similar though more complete depôts at the bases, known as Base Depôts Medical Stores, which supply the advanced depôts and base units. There are convalescent depôts, hugely elaborated during this war and deserving of full description ; and again there are the ambulance trains, which ply between the various units, assisted in these days, and indeed since September 1914, by an army of motor ambulances grouped into convoys and known as Motor Ambulance Convoys. These units, like the casualty clearing stations, have proved veritable "sheet-anchors" to the medical service.

Finally, these various units destined for service overseas, or anywhere with our Expeditionary Force, were

under the control of a Director-General—in August 1914 Sir Arthur Sloggett—while the Director of Medical Services with the British Expeditionary Force in France was Surgeon-General Woodhouse.

So much for the Army Medical Service. The Royal Army Medical Corps and its units will become more familiar as the narrative progresses.

It becomes necessary now to allude to the organising work done by the Director-General prior to the war. Not satisfied with the reorganising of the service for which he was responsible, Sir Alfred Keogh was able to co-ordinate the organisation of the services of our Dominions and Colonies. At his invitation officers from the Medical Corps of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa were sent to this country to study the training of the R.A.M.C., and in the end there was brought into being in all these Dominions and Colonies services precisely similar to that existing in the United Kingdom, organised on precisely the same pattern, equipped in absolutely similar manner. This in itself has proved of inestimable value during the course of this tragic war.

The Indian Medical Service is likewise organised on similar lines to that of the R.A.M.C., differing only in minor details, and in the provision of sections with its field ambulances and its hospitals staffed by Indian medical officers and orderlies, whose special work it is to care for the Indian soldier.

Finally we come to the Territorial Force and its medical service, which has without doubt proved of signal value to the country. It, too, came under the composite scheme already alluded to. It was trained and organised precisely as was the regular medical service, and for that reason when the war began it was wholly familiar with its duties. But it specialised in one direction. To it was assigned the particular duty of organising general hospitals in the United Kingdom, twenty-one in number. This entailed a series of schemes which were carefully drafted years before the outbreak

of hostilities and which provided for the use of certain buildings, and their instant rearrangement as hospitals, while at the same time it mobilised an adequate staff from the immediate neighbourhood. As a matter of fact these twenty-one hospitals were schemed to open at centres where hospital schools existed and where the staff and the resident medical men would be available for the military hospital when opened. The scheme did not exist only on paper. Personnel for each prospective hospital was trained during each year, and full arrangements were made to meet any crisis. That crisis came on August 4, 1914. By August 15 the majority of the twenty-one Territorial Force hospitals were fully prepared for patients, and by the end of the month their beds were filling with men of Mons—men of the "Contemptible" and ever glorious army.

Linked with the Territorial Force hospitals, affiliated to them and holding beds available to relieve them of their cases, there rapidly opened a veritable host of auxiliary hospitals, staffed by volunteers in almost every case and organised by Voluntary Aid Detachments, which now had the great opportunity of proving the worth of that training to which they had subjected themselves during times of peace. For the most part they were under the control of the B.R.C.S. or the Order of St. John, and later under those two bodies conjoined, a conjoint society, which in the case of its auxiliary hospitals, as in a thousand other directions, has given such willing and splendid assistance to the medical service. More must be written in due course of these auxiliary hospitals and of the civil and purely private hospitals organised to meet the great needs of our numerous sick and wounded. Of the Territorial Force hospitals themselves it is only necessary to add at this point the fact that they were presently increased to twenty-four, while all were greatly expanded. In course of time, too, great war hospitals were organised so as to meet the fullest needs of the country.

Nurses and a nursing service were of course essentials

for the well-being of the wounded soldier, and their need was not overlooked in the general reorganisation of the various medical services. The R.A.M.C. possessed an efficient and adequately staffed Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service, of which Dame Ethel Becher is, and was, the distinguished Matron-in-Chief. To this service was added a reserve, while the Territorial Nursing Service and the Colonial and Dominion Services had also their nursing establishment.

It need hardly be explained that the existing establishments and their reserves proved wholly inadequate to grapple with the enormous amount of work which this war has thrown upon nurses, and which, incidentally, they have carried out with such noble devotion. The assistance of the large majority of the trained nurses of the Empire has been willingly given, and the record of the war and of our hospitals proves without shadow of doubt that the still further help given by thousands of semi-trained or untrained voluntary aid workers has been of vital importance to our wounded. This has been a woman's war as much as a man's. Women have laboured in our factories throughout the Empire, but they have laboured as assiduously and have been of equal value in the hundreds of hospitals which have harboured the men wrecked by disease or by the action of the enemy.

Briefly, but adequately, it is hoped the general preparedness of the medical profession of the Empire for war has been outlined, as well as that of the thousands of workers voluntary and otherwise essential, if the work of the medical service was to be effective. That being so, it remains now to particularise on the R.A.M.C. and its separate units, so that its record during the first phase of the war—at Mons, on the Marne, and at the Aisne—may be the more easily followed. It should be borne in mind that the active list contained too few officers and men of the R.A.M.C. to staff all the units needed for work with the British Expeditionary Force,

and that to make good the gaps, men must be called from the reserve, from purely civil life, even from amongst volunteers to make the organisation effective. How effective the following chapters show, as they demonstrate also the extraordinary difficulties and hazards encountered by the various medical units.

## CHAPTER II

The course of a wounded man from front line to England—The various units of the Medical Service—Field Ambulances and their inadequate transport—The Motor Ambulance and the Horsed Ambulance—Distinctive duties of the British Red Cross Society and the Order of St. John and the R.A.M.C.

Let us trace the course of a wounded or sick man from the very front of one of our armies, a course differing, as one may suppose, according to the varying conditions and circumstances of terrain and of fighting. The man was—we will say—on outpost duty and was hit by the bullet of a sniper. A regimental stretcher-bearer crawls from shell-hole to shell-hole till he reaches the patient, and because of his training in first aid, now assisted by ripe experience, rapidly examines the wound and applies a first field-dressing to it, more with a view to excluding dirt than to obtaining any particular surgical advantage.

Shells are raining about the place maybe. The devoted bearer cowers beside his patient, even shields him with his own body. Bearers have won their own particular reputation on our fighting fronts, so that no one will cavil at this description. For stretcher-bearers, though sometimes of indifferent physique, are made of heroic stuff, and have done much—very much—to gain the appreciation of other soldiers and to heighten the reputation of their own corps.

Perhaps there is a lull in the firing. The bearer hoists the man to his shoulders and staggers across broken ground to the shelter of the trench. Or perhaps it was there that the man received his wound. He is slung in a waterproof sheet and borne along a winding

and narrow communication trench through inches of mud to a gaping doorway. The letters "R.A.P." indicate that it is the Regimental Aid Post. In the early days of the war it was perhaps a wrecked cottage, an old barn, a shaking ruin. But shell-fire soon drove it beneath ground till the regimental aid post was located in a deep dug-out. Whatever the position there the regimental surgeon bends over his patient, redresses the wound if need be, sums up the man's general condition, applies restoratives—perhaps detains him because of the danger to life of further movement, or because a burst of shelling makes delay imperative.

It may be that night falls before the opportunity arrives to evacuate the patient. Come the moment will, when, now on a stretcher, and if suffering from a fractured leg, with the injured limb immobilised by a suitable splint, the man is borne along the trench to the point where it opens. There a relay-post of bearers of a field ambulance are waiting. The stretcher is placed on a light-wheeled carrier if a track exists, even upon a horsed ambulance under favourable conditions, and in rarer cases direct upon a motor ambulance. Too often, though, bearers must struggle back, accompanied by reliefs, till firm ground is reached and the mud and the shell-holes of the forward area are left behind.

The wounded man is now out of the hands of the regimental medical unit, and in that of a field ambulance. This latter unit is one of the hardest worked and most efficient units of the army, and seeing that it works with cavalry and infantry, it has been organised specially for each particular service. That is to say, there are cavalry field ambulances and field ambulances designed for service with infantry units. The former were, it was hoped, sufficiently mobile to cope with the most rapid movement. It was anticipated that the latter would quite easily maintain contact with infantry units. Yet, as facts revealed themselves, in August 1914 both classes of field ambulance were

hopelessly immobile when engaged with wounded. That this statement is true in fact will be the more readily perceived as the narrative of events during the retreat from Mons is perused. It is a truth rendered even more glaring as the Marne was crossed and the valley of the River Aisne reached; for there, beneath the famous Chemin-des-Dames—the Ladies' Road—across which and for which bloody conflict raged during all the years of the fighting, there, on the banks of the river, the real cause of their fatal want of mobility was remedied, and active and efficient steps were taken to make good the one item of equipment of these particular units which had hitherto marred their usefulness. Not until the really auspicious moment when this sadly needed requirement was supplied was the precise reason of the hitherto want of mobility of field ambulances appreciated to its full extent. Dependence on horse transport for the movement of each individual unit and for the evacuation of its patients was obviously the fault, but how much the fault—how fatally and exasperatingly it hampered these medical units, only became fully and widely recognised when motor ambulances, long asked for by the Director-General in times of peace, were rushed to the Aisne, at the insistent call of war, and at once relieved the situation.

The narrative of the great Retreat from Mons—an epic of British endurance—of our advance across the Marne and of the first week's fighting on the Aisne, produces its own clear evidence of the breakdown of horse transport and of the paralysing effect it had on the efficiency of our otherwise efficient field ambulances. With that evidence go obvious strictures. For here was the Expeditionary Force of the wealthiest nation of the world supplied with a medical service on which thought and continuous and far-seeing effort had been expended, an organisation the forward units of which—the essential and vital units, one may say—were rendered semi-inactive because of the need of equipment which could have been supplied at relatively small expenditure.

The fault lies not with the medical service, for it had foreseen this want of motor ambulances. Its Director-General had realised that mobility was the essence of success in modern warfare, and what more mobile than the motor? Yet a Director-General is by no means all-powerful. He can recommend, and to be precise did recommend, the supply of motor ambulances. He can reiterate his demands with some degree of force. But he does not decide the issue.

In point of fact this was a question which was, in the main, determined by the General Staff and by the Finance Department, and while it is not possible to go deeply into the question, one may state that fear of congested roads behind our divisions made the General Staff chary of sanctioning convoys of motor ambulances. The Finance Department had its annual estimates to consider, and no doubt it hesitated to approve of a scheme hardly yet accepted even in principle by the General Staff—a scheme which must of necessity be experimental, seeing that motor ambulances had never yet been employed in warfare—and moreover, a scheme which would cost money.

Search the record of the great retreat for the inevitable result of this unfortunate decision. Seek the evidence of wounded officers and men who passed through purgatory on horsed ambulances and motor lorries. Question those unfortunate men of Mons, prisoners since 1914, wounded in the first hours of the war—abandoned for lack of transport. The dead yield no word of these doings. Yet men died for this selfsame reason.

To continue the course of the wounded man, now in the hands of the field ambulance; he is borne as rapidly as possible back to the advanced dressing station, which may be above or below ground, and as likely as not is within easy distance of the front line and certainly under range of enemy guns. Farther behind there is a main dressing station, perhaps in a church, a mansion, or a farm-house. Latterly, as the war progressed and the

British Expeditionary Force assumed vast proportions and its operations became increasingly extensive, these advanced dressing stations and main dressing stations, organised by individual field ambulances, became frequently welded together. There was a tendency to amalgamate units, to join forces so as the more readily to deal with more strenuous conditions. In this manner one or more dressing stations were organised for each corps, not for each division or each brigade as formerly. But whether grouped or otherwise, the routine as regards the wounded man differed hardly at all. Arrived at the advanced dressing station his wound was closely examined, perhaps redressed, a cup of hot tea provided, and bread and jam or other food. Then the man went on by motor ambulance to the main dressing station. That is, he went on provided his condition did not forbid further movement. Shock and the strain of subsequent movement undoubtedly cost lives in the earlier days of the war when wounded in large numbers overwhelmed the field ambulances, and evacuation was essential. Even though men in obviously extreme condition were detained, there was little to be done beyond providing restoratives and rest. Tranquillity was out of the question. But other methods supervened. The value of warmth as a restorative became increasingly recognised, and "rechauffement wards" had their place at all dressing stations, be they merely in some rickety barn or a mere dug-out. Blankets kept out draughts, stoves provided warmth, and special arrangements were organised to heat up the patient's body and revitalise his forces.

Speaking generally, field ambulances do not undertake surgical operations other than the most trivial, though in the first two months of the war operations were an important part of their mission. But the British Expeditionary Force was then engaged essentially in mobile warfare, and the tax upon French railroads and means of transport generally did not allow of the early arrival of the clearing hospital—the casualty clearing

station as it is now known. During the retreat towards Paris and the advance over the Marne casualty clearing stations gave but a tenth part of the assistance they gave in later months. Thus surgical operations fell to the field ambulances, which became mobile hospitals.

Following the hypothetical case we have been tracing, our wounded man passes from advanced dressing station to the main dressing station of some field ambulance, is more precisely dressed, receives an injection of anti-tetanic serum, is fed, and all his particulars are duly entered in the Admission and Discharge book of the unit. Also they are attached to his own person in the shape of a label—now known as a field medical card—which has changed in appearance and in the scope of the information inscribed upon it more than once since 1914. Briefly explained, this card provides information for the next medical officer as to the condition of the patient when he left the previous unit. Further notes are added, and so on as he progresses to the base and to England. There the effect of some special operation can be appraised, and, seeing that by experience and trial can man alone advance his knowledge, that report returned from some hospital in England to a medical unit in France upon a post card enclosed with the field medical card for the special purpose, gives early information to some particular army surgeon or physician as to the success or otherwise of his methods. It keeps him in touch with his case, encourages and greatly assists him.

The wounded man leaves the main dressing station, cigarette in mouth, tucked up in blankets, lying on a comfortable stretcher, in a motor ambulance which defies criticism. In 1914 he was shaken and rocked in a horsed ambulance wagon, or he was racked in every joint in a swaying, rattling motor lorry. To the lightly wounded such a journey was no hardship. To the man of 1914 whose thigh was fractured such transport was a progression through purgatory, enduring the tortures of the damned.

With the wounded man's departure from the field ambulance that unit can be dismissed for the moment with but brief additional description. It is a combined unit, bearer and hospital, and so that it may function accordingly it is divisible into a bearer and a tent division, each such division being as readily split into three sections. Thus a single field ambulance could send out three sections of bearers and could open three dressing stations, each independent of the other. In August 1914 it could—on paper and under accommodating circumstances and over fair roads—transport some 120 cases in its ambulance wagons, how slowly only those who tramped the roads from Mons can fully appreciate. Then men of the R.A.M.C. harnessed themselves to ambulance wagons in the place of foundered horses, and medical officers turned their heads away and became blasphemous as they marched on, leaving wounded whom they could not carry.

The motor ambulance revolutionised the evacuation of wounded. In August 1914 our wounded man would have reached the nearest casualty clearing station on a horsed ambulance wagon belonging to the field ambulance through which he had passed, for there was then no other means of evacuating. In 1915 and thereafter he would be aboard a motor ambulance, part of a motor ambulance convoy, one of which worked with each division, while all field ambulances had motor ambulances, reserving a solitary horsed ambulance wagon for use in forward areas where extensive shelling of roads and want of repair had made transport by motor ambulance out of the question.

The motor ambulance convoy has been literally the sheet-anchor of directors of the medical service. It has saved impossible situations. The hopeless congestion of wounded near the front is a condition which every officer of the medical service dreads and seeks to avoid, a situation oft-times threatened when masses of wounded, and weather conditions, have made evacuation an almost impossible problem. But the motor ambulance

convoy has done marvels in such circumstances. No degree of shelling has curtailed the effort and determination of its drivers. They and the drivers of motor lorries, upon which thousands of the lightly wounded have been sent down the line, have been a veritable godsend to the army.

The doors of a casualty clearing station are thrown open to our wounded man, and he is borne within them. Whether under canvas or in some building the routine is the same, though in 1914 far less elaborate and therefore less productive of results than in the later years of the conflict.

Full details of the man are secured as he is set down in the receiving ward. A medical officer bends over him, scrutinises the matter on his field medical card, and gives a swift decision. Our man has borne the journey well. There is no need to send him to the rechauffement ward of the casualty clearing station. He has a severe gun-shot wound of the thigh, and the femur is fractured. The limb is already "put up" in a Thomas' splint and is wonderfully comfortable. "Pre-op. ward," the medical officer pronounces, and at once the patient is borne into an adjacent apartment. Nursing sisters are there. They chat with him. He is undressed and cleansed by nursing orderlies with a tenderness and care which vie with that of woman herself.

"I cannot speak too highly of our nursing sisters," a brother officer says. "The nation will never be capable of sufficiently expressing its thanks for their devotion, nor will our Tommies ever forget those women. But those trained nursing orderlies of the R.A.M.C.—the good ones—and there are many of them—are tenderness itself to our poor fellows. I never see them at work with some serious case but I gulp—it's almost pathetic."

Bearing wounded from the front calls for initiative and courage, often for life's sacrifice itself. Transporting them to a casualty clearing station has its own particular trials. But to nurse a man well, so that woman nurses envy your skill and cannot surpass your devotion

—that is a phase of the R.A.M.C. work surely unsuspected by the public.

To proceed. Washed and clean and comfortable the wounded man is borne into the operating theatre. There are at least four tables, screened from one another, and four surgeons, all extremely busy. Another glance at the field medical card, the man meanwhile is anæsthetised, in the latter days of the war by a woman. He "comes to" in one of the surgical wards. He sleeps and eats and chats. Then the motor ambulance convoy carries him to an ambulance train, and thence he passes to a base hospital, where, being a fracture case, he goes to a fracture ward, and remains for some weeks in France. If otherwise, he may leave for England in a day or so, aboard an ambulance transport. In 1914 onward to 1917 it was a luxurious hospital ship, bearing the Red Cross, brilliantly lighted at night. But the German has been no ordinary mortal, nor even just a mere exponent of violence. He has been the apostle of ruthless and cold-blooded murder. To many an infamy he has added the torpedoing of hospital ships, so that the Red Cross, respected by all other nationalities, having no particular significance to him, has not served to protect hospital ships. It was painted out, and from 1917 onward our wounded man reached England upon a ship, luxurious enough, but bearing no particular mark showing her calling.

At home the "case" proceeds by ambulance train to one of the twenty-four great Territorial Force hospitals organised by local Territorial Force centres, or to some war hospital, or perhaps to a civil hospital with beds made available for soldiers, or to a well-equipped and often privately maintained auxiliary hospital. Wherever it be, it is home. Rest, first-class treatment and nursing follow, and, later, convalescence and furlough. Then back to the Front perhaps, a little reluctantly, proud of the wound stripe, or to a special hospital for more treatment, to a hospital for the limbless, to an orthopædic, a nerve, an eye, or some other unit. Perhaps to the place where

a Medical Board is sitting. "Unfit for further service." The man is pensioned. He appears in mufti with a silver badge and his wound stripe. The shell-hole and the bearer who stood by him over there at the Front become a fading memory. But the limp reminds him. At night, when his wound aches and he is restless, he sometimes traces his own progression from the Front, remembers the subdued light in the casualty clearing station, the moving figures, the flitting nurses, recollects that nursing orderly who helped the nursing sister. Is he grateful and appreciative of the R.A.M.C.—the medical service? Ask him.

The rapid progress of a wounded man from Front to Base and thence to England has been one of the features of the war, as rapid almost as the above description. Therein, his admission to and evacuation from the various units has, no doubt, given some indication of their functions, more particularly of those of the regimental unit, the field ambulance, and the motor ambulance convoy. Some further description, however, is needed of others of the units, though necessarily it must be brief, while mention should be made of organisations not yet indicated.

The casualty clearing station has proved of vital service and has done immense and important work. It has been a vital link in the scheme of medical arrangements, and has again and again justified its existence. During the South African War no such unit was in being, and the medical service has to thank General Macpherson amongst others for their wise forethought in establishing such an organisation. As first designed it was intended, as in the case of the field ambulance, to be distinctly and essentially mobile, so that it might follow closely behind an army and keep in touch with field ambulances. It was to relieve those units—and has so relieved them—of all cases, and having treated them suitably was to evacuate them to hospitals on the lines of communication. Rapid evacuation was to be a *sine qua non*, otherwise hopeless congestion would result.

First as to mobility. The casualty clearing station was designed to accommodate two hundred patients, for whom it carried paillasse cases and adequate marquees and equipment. Its transport was to be supplied by the railway and by the supply and transport department. The conditions of warfare in France brought about drastic changes and called for many additions to the equipment of such units. In the first months of the conflict tents were practically discarded, seeing that permanent buildings were obtainable. Then trench warfare and an immobilised army permitted the supply of huts, though canvas was employed to supplement accommodation. The most prominent metamorphosis of this class of unit was in the direction of size and interior equipment. Designed to accommodate two hundred, its beds have in numerous cases approached 2000 in number. Its paillasses have given place to real beds, and its equipment, supplemented because of its expansion, has been consistently and generously augmented by the British Red Cross Society and the Order of St. John, who have supplied an infinity of articles—mats, pillows, pictures, what not—till casualty clearing stations have borne all the appearance and have vied with the comfort of permanent base or general hospitals. In point of actual fact, from January 1915 onward to July 1916, the casualty clearing station was, in effect, a forward semi-permanent hospital. Then the operations on the Somme called for a move to the east and the employment of canvas and easily portable huts, buildings having crumbled under shell-fire. This condition may be said to have existed up to and beyond the cessation of hostilities.

Ambulance trains deserve further description. In the first weeks of the war we were dependent on our Ally for the provision of rolling stock, and the result was no less unfortunate than in the case of field ambulance transport. Ambulance trains consisted of a length of goods trucks—*fourgeons de marchandise*—indescribably uncomfortable even when specially fitted, providing no

means of inter-communication and therefore fatally curtailing the efforts of those placed on them to attend the wounded. The employment of nursing sisters was out of the question, and that alone was sufficient to condemn the arrangement. Short springs and a constricted wheel base resulted in extremely uncomfortable travel, so that from every and any point of view the arrangement was unsatisfactory. The provision of hot water, hot meals, tea, cocoa, etc., was out of the question, while the absence of inter-communication, previously referred to, and the natural keenness of commanding officers nearly resulted in the very first week of the war in the death or serious injury of at least two of them who essayed the hazardous task of clambering from truck to truck while the train was in motion.

Happily for our wounded, specially fitted ambulance trains were in our possession within a month of the first days' fighting, and these have provided splendid accommodation. The fourgeon was discarded at once, much to the relief of the R.A.M.C. and, doubtless, of their patients.

Base hospitals need no particular description at this stage. The functions of advanced and base depôts of medical stores are sufficiently indicated by their designation. Convalescent depôts will be referred to in detail in future volumes, and it needs only to mention that just as they absorbed convalescents, passing them under investigation, and rendering a high percentage of returns to duty, so did a new unit, the outcome of the war, to wit, the divisional rest station, deal with the semi-ill in forward areas.

Territorial Force hospitals in England, war hospitals, the efforts of civil hospitals and of a very numerous band of voluntary workers who opened and staffed auxiliary hospitals have been mentioned already. They, and the voluntary workers who crossed to France soon after the commencement of hostilities, and who worked indefatigably throughout the duration of the war, giving service of incalculable value, will demand

attention at a later period, seeing that their effort dates from October 1914. Yet mention now, though brief in the extreme, is necessary, seeing that the men of Mons, of the Marne, and of the Aisne—those gallant " Contemptibles "—found a haven in the units organised by this numerous and enthusiastic band of volunteers.

Lastly, before we pursue the fortunes of the Army Medical Service further, it were well to emphasise a point apt at times to be ill-conceived by the public. The R.A.M.C. is not the Red Cross, though it has the honour to work under that symbol. The Red Cross in this war stands for the British Red Cross Society and the Order of St. John, a joint body separate from and entirely independent of the Army Medical Service, yet working loyally and most helpfully with it. Under the control of its Chairman, Sir Arthur Stanley, it has accomplished a gigantic work, and after the British soldier—and many an allied soldier too—the Army Medical Service is the first to acknowledge its thanks and its indebtedness. It is the conjoint society which in this war has given so generously to the Army Medical Service those comforts and luxuries which have assisted toward the cure of the sick and wounded, and which they have so appreciated.

It will be found that it was this energetic body which came to the assistance of the R.A.M.C. in the early weeks of the war, and by the provision of motor ambulances helped not a little to save a more or less desperate situation. The British Red Cross Society did in fact, then and later, during the whole course of the war render most valuable services to our sick and wounded.

It is, on the other hand, the Army Medical Service, the R.A.M.C., whose duty it has been to succour those sick and wounded, to carry them out of danger, to treat their injuries, and either at the Front or at home to nurse them back to health and strength.

At the head of that R.A.M.C. in August 1914, as Director-General, was Sir Arthur Sloggett. With him was an able and experienced administrator in the person

of General Macpherson. Sir Alfred Keogh, the late Director-General, was Chief Commissioner of the British Red Cross. But this gigantic war has demanded the services of the nation. The Army Medical Service required the assistance of every one of its trained heads and provided work for all. It called for the return of Sir Alfred Keogh to direct the expansion of a service which he had largely created, and it sent Sir Arthur Sloggett, and with him General Macpherson, to France, there to control the greatest medical service that has ever been concentrated on any front, and to compete with difficulties which have often been of an extremely urgent nature.

# CHAPTER III

Medical units transferred to France, August 1914—Movement to the Concentration Area—First engagement—The first casualties—The military situation—Medical units present on the morning of August 23—The medical situation generally.

Few will forget the evening of Tuesday the 4th of August 1914, when Great Britain declared war on Germany, and few recall in their entirety the many incidents and excitements which followed.

The Expeditionary Force which was to proceed to France and there co-operate with our French Ally was hurriedly mobilised, and with it there took place an equally hurried mobilisation of the medical service. The Force, which was to proceed overseas, and which was to be known as the British Expeditionary Force, was intended to consist of seven divisions, that is, of three corps, each of two divisions, and of a cavalry division. But we shall see that whereas the Cavalry Division and the First, Second, Third, and Fifth Divisions reached France and took part in the fighting at Mons, the Fourth Division did not leave England in time to arrive at the scene of operations until a day after that first conflict, while the Sixth Division did not set foot on the soil of France until the retreat from Mons had ended.

The same may be said of the medical units which had been mobilised to accompany the British Expeditionary Force. The organisation allowed for three field ambulances with each division, and four with a division of cavalry. In addition there had to be provided one clearing hospital for each one of the divisions, making

six in all, twelve stationary hospitals, which were designed to go anywhere on the lines of communication, six ambulance trains, and twelve base hospitals, where wounded and sick alike could be treated under semi-permanent or even permanent conditions. Other units have already been enumerated.

The enumeration of units is one thing. The bringing together—the actual mobilising of the necessary personnel—is an entirely different and certainly a more complex affair, needing the mind of a skilled organiser, for upon his organisation depends the genesis or otherwise of each unit. Briefly enough a mobilisation scheme designs to bring together at some prearranged spot a medley of individuals, each chosen, perhaps long beforehand, for his special qualifications. It must provide a commanding officer for each unit, the necessary officers, including specialist surgeons, bacteriologists, etc., nursing sisters, a quartermaster, trained orderlies, ambulance drivers, water-duty men, and others. It must concentrate each band of workers at some prearranged spot whence transport by land or by sea has been arranged for in the co-ordinated mobilisation scheme of the Director of Movements, and there it must have stored and kept up to date and complete the equipment needed by each individual unit, dressings, instruments, stretchers, ambulance wagons, carts, harness, horse-shoes, lamps, cooking utensils, stationery—a heterogeneous collection of material.

As to personnel—the officer personnel—what with its duties overseas, the R.A.M.C. had insufficient on its active list to staff all the units needed for the British Expeditionary Force. The scheme, therefore, included the calling up of officers on the reserve, of young medical men on the special reserve—and later, of more recent volunteers.

"Mobilise," read the laconic telegram each officer received on the morning of the 5th August 1914. Instantly there followed a hurried opening of the innermost recess of some desk, of some safe, of the particular

receptacle in which each individual had stored his mobilisation orders. "Secret" appeared in large red letters on the outside of each unopened packet. At once the envelope was rent asunder.

"Report at ——. You will join No. —— General Hospital." Kits were packed. Silk-hatted practitioners in decorous black reappeared in khaki. Trains bore officers, nursing sisters, orderlies, drivers, horses to their varying destinations. And behold! the middle of August 1914 discovered every unit complete, a personnel gathered from the four corners under one roof, things shaking down and some cohesion already appearing, while even the horses were settling down to new surroundings.

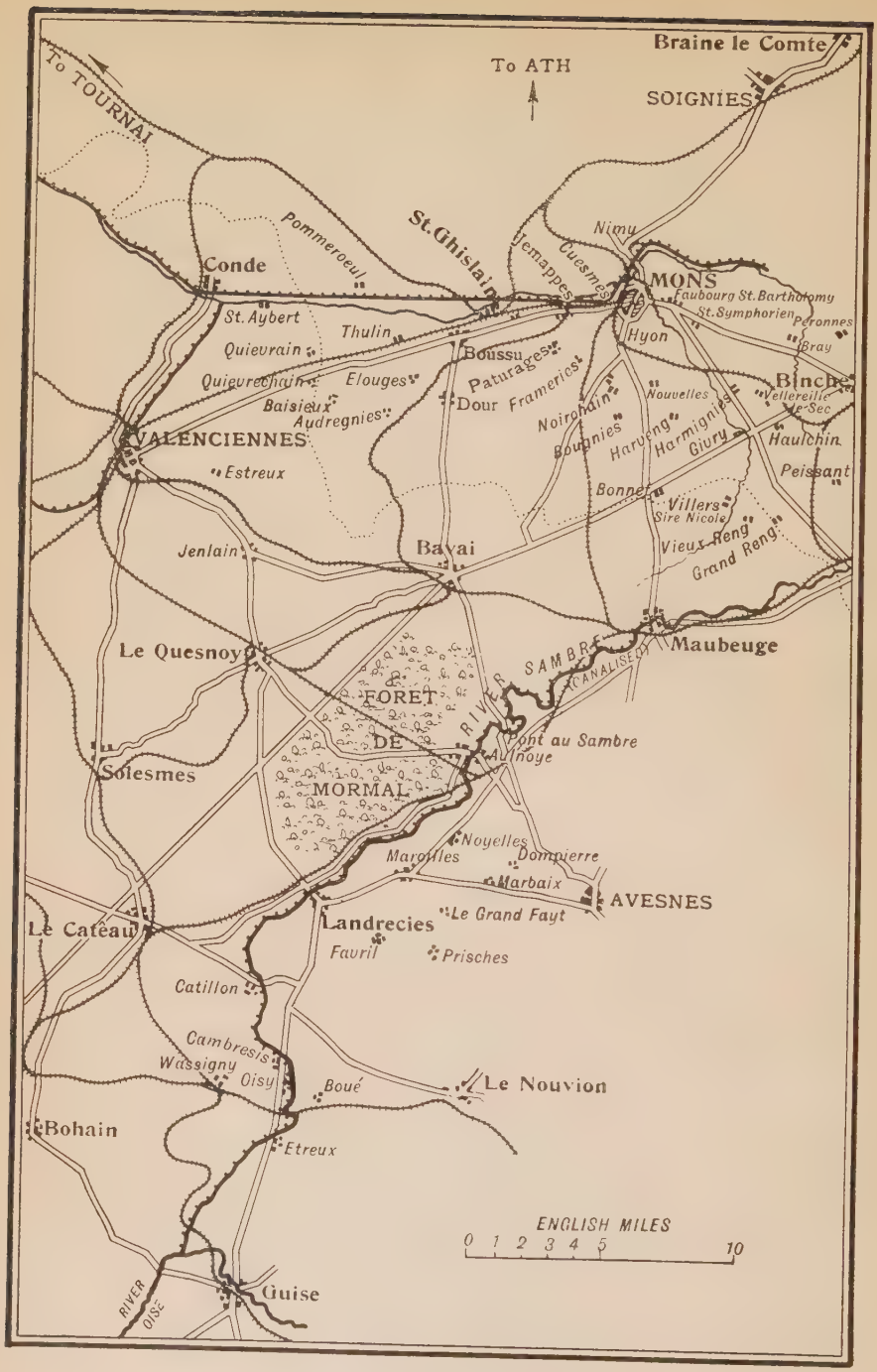
Thus were brought into being every medical unit needed for our British Expeditionary Force. But all these units did not contrive to reach the scene of operations at the moment when the first British gun opened behind the line between Mons and Condé. It should be recollected that in every case, whether of fighting troops or of medical units, they had to be conveyed by railway from the port at which they disembarked in France to an area south of that in which the fighting was taking place, and one can realise how the railways of France were congested in those latter days of August.

Shipping was also severely pressed, though transports sailed regularly and reached their allotted destinations in every case without the loss of a single soldier.

Imagine the throb of excitement at those French ports and the easing of a tense situation as British help, and good, lusty, laughing British soldiers disembarked and tramped off to their rest camps!

"At every ferry and hamlet as we steamed up the serpentine course of the Seine," writes an officer of one of the field ambulances, "there were crowds of women and children, all shouting at the top of their voices, 'Vive l'Angleterre.' To this the troops replied lustily with 'Tipperary' and 'Are we downhearted?'"

Then came the journey to the Mons area, and the same writer says:




THE MONS–CONDÉ LINE.

We found French trucks exceedingly ill-adapted for loading our wagons. It meant frightfully hard work and great delay in loading.

As one would suppose, the Cavalry division, consisting of five brigades, with which marched the five cavalry field ambulances which had been allotted to them, went in advance of the infantry units, while the latter rendezvoused in the neighbourhood of Le Cateau and pleasant little villages in that rolling country, about the 20th August. Here, too, came the medical units, such as the railway had been able to transport, though several of them were still in transit. (See Map I.)

From this concentration area the British Expeditionary Force marched north, toiling along the *pavé* roads with its baggage columns covering miles, its field ambulances following and picking up the stragglers. Those early days told upon the British infantryman. More than 50 per cent of the troops were Reservists, fresh from civil life and therefore comparatively out of training and condition. Recent inoculation had not improved matters, so that as the divisions marched north numbers of men fell out, and some—a few only—were so exhausted that they had to be left behind in the villages or towns through which the battalions passed. Men with blistered feet filled the ambulance wagons, so that by the time the divisions reached their allotted positions or their immediate neighbourhood, the horses of the ambulances were already exhausted. Considering the adverse conditions, however, the British Expeditionary Force completed the march in very satisfactory manner.

Other difficulties beset the field ambulances, for horses cast shoes with exasperating frequency and wagons and harness needed attention. But the personnel of these mobile units did not in those days include farriers, wheelwrights, and saddlers, so that to effect repairs men had to be begged—almost stolen—from A.S.C. and cavalry units.

Following as closely as could be the brigades of the Cavalry division, the cavalry field ambulances were the

first amongst our medical units to smell powder. Not that the cavalry was seriously engaged between the 20th of August, when it moved up to the Mons area, and the morning of Sunday, August 23, when the Germans commenced their onslaught; but there were lively outpost affairs, one in particular towards Soignies on August 22, well to the north of Mons, where a troop of the 4th Dragoon Guards of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade chanced upon a troop of Uhlans and, swinging into their stride at once, swept down upon and through the enemy, using their swords to some purpose.

The other affair took place towards the east, where a bridge crosses the Estinne River, a tributary of the Haine, and gives access to Peronnes, a little Belgian village nestling amongst the wooded slopes of the river. Here two troops of the Greys held up an advance of enemy troops, the first shot being fired at 10.10 A.M., and, reinforced by a squadron of the regiment with a machine-gun, stopped the advance abruptly and continued in action till Peronnes was in flames, the enemy having shelled it, and till some forty of the German advance guard had been put out of action.

The only casualty on our side was an officer of the Greys, whose thigh was smashed by a rifle bullet. The 2nd Cavalry Field Ambulance dressed his wound and conveyed him in a light ambulance wagon to Givry, where he was placed in a monastery and later taken care of by one of the field ambulances.

This officer casualty was not, it would appear, the first to be suffered by the British Expeditionary Force, for as early as August 18 two officers of the Royal Flying Corps had suffered disaster near Peronne, on the Somme, falling on ground which in 1916 and in 1918 was to be the scene of a terrific struggle, though whether they were brought down by enemy action or by pure accident is uncertain.

Toiling over the *pavé* roads, which criss-cross the mining country over the Belgian border, the field ambulances left the tree-clad area north of Le Cateau,

BATTLE POSITIONS AT MONS.

Landrecies, Maroilles, and many another pleasant French village, and presently halted in rear of the troops with whom they were to do duty. The 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Cavalry Field Ambulances had a strenuous day on the 22nd, for, following the movement of the First Cavalry Division, they trekked west late in the afternoon, from the neighbourhood of Mons and Binche to that of Quievrain.

By then the Second Corps had crossed the Belgian frontier, swept past the coal-dumps and smoke-blackened villages of the coal-field, and leaving a forest of shafts and chimneys behind, had gained the canal where it runs from Condé to Mons. As they did so the Cavalry division, with its cavalry field ambulances, moved west behind them, as stated, leaving the 5th Cavalry Brigade to watch the eastern flank of the British Expeditionary Force, near Binche, its patrols already in touch with Sordét's French Cavalry Corps in the neighbourhood of Fontaine l'Evêque.

The move of the four cavalry field ambulances which we have just recorded was no easy affair, and led already to the suspicion that in units such as these, where mobility was the essence of their success in action, that feature was a little uncertain. It was not before 4 P.M. of the 23rd that all reached their destination, and then only with teams and men thoroughly fatigued after a long march over *pavé* of the most execrable description.

Field ambulances of the First, Second, Third, and Fifth Divisions marched into positions in rear of the infantry brigades to which they had become for the time being attached, and made ready for action. Their movements will be more easily followed if taken by divisions; and it will better portray the general situation if the military situation is described as tersely as may be, yet with sufficient detail, from one flank of the British Expeditionary Force to the other. (See Map II.)

It should be borne in mind that, after the cavalry, the Third and Fifth Divisions of the Second Corps first

gained the Mons area. The First and Second Divisions of the First Corps did not march into position in some cases till after the very early hours of Sunday, August 23, and the 19th Infantry Brigade, composed of lines of communication units hastily assembled and railed up to the front, did not fall into line till the afternoon of the same day, when the battle had been joined, and fighting, particularly in front of the Third Division, had been for some while in progress.

The canal, which stretches from Condé, an old fortified town of France, to Mons, once a walled city, in which Marlborough's troops were billeted in 1709 after its capture, there turns north and describes a wide loop about Mons, and then continues eastward. As a means of obstruction to the advance of an invading force it and its surroundings offer few advantages and some insuperable disadvantages, not the least of which is the enclosed nature of the country to the north, allowing of an enemy's approach almost unobserved, and screening him from the effective action of opposing artillery.

It was this canal line upon which Sir John French directed one of his two corps and his cavalry brigades, massing infantry along the canal, holding the north of Mons with strong pickets, and keeping his right flank swung back in the direction of Binche so that it looked towards distant Charleroi. As narrated already, the British Expeditionary Force did not get into complete alignment till August 23, and not until the conflict had actually opened. The position then of its various divisions and brigades was as follows: Commencing in the west, at Condé, the 19th Infantry Brigade had replaced the 4th Cavalry Brigade and held the canal towards Thulin. Here a squadron of the 4th Cavalry Brigade filled a gap as far as the Thulin—Pommerœul Bridge, the 2nd Cavalry Brigade was at Thulin, the 3rd and 1st Cavalry Brigades being at Élouges and Audregnies respectively, and the 4th swung to face the west near Estreux, where it watched the left flank of the army. In command of this section of the

defences was General Allenby, commanding the Cavalry division, and later in the war to win laurels in Palestine by the conquest of Jerusalem.

Passing east, there lay the Second Corps, comprising the Fifth and Third Divisions with Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien in command. The three brigades of the Fifth Division were disposed south of the canal, the 15th in reserve and entrenching near Boussu, the 14th, stretched from the right of the 4th Cavalry Brigade to the Pont des Herbières, and the 13th Infantry Brigade thence to Mariette. These two latter infantry brigades had strong companies to the north of the canal where they awaited the enemy in hurriedly dug trenches.

Still proceeding east there came the Third Division, its 9th Infantry Brigade on the canal from Mariette as far as Nimy, guarding the bridge at Jemappes, which was soon to be the scene of a terrible struggle. Thence swept the 8th Infantry Brigade from Nimy to the Faubourg St. Barthélemy, and south-east of it, scene on the 23rd of August of fierce fighting. Behind Mons itself, across the arc of the salient which the canal describes, there lay the reserves of the 9th Infantry Brigade, and in their rear, at Ciply, the 7th Infantry Brigade, digging in in case their comrades were driven back on them.

We now reach the line occupied by the First Corps commanded by General Sir Douglas Haig. Its First Division lay to the south-east of the Second, so that we will take the latter first. The 6th Infantry Brigade was dug in from the right of the 8th Infantry Brigade of the Third Division to Vellereille-le-Sec, and in support of it, at Harveng, was the 4th Infantry Brigade, composed of Guards battalions. The 5th Infantry Brigade was in reserve at Bougnies, where it was in position to support almost any part of the British front except that on the extreme left.

Lastly, the First Division and the 5th Cavalry Brigade. The 1st Infantry Brigade lay between Vieux Reng and Grand Reng, astride the Belgian frontier, the 2nd near Villers Sire Nicole, and the 3rd holding the front

line Haulchin—Peissant with the 5th Cavalry Brigade to the east and north in the neighbourhood of Binche.

The medical situation as it existed on the morning of the 23rd of August is of considerable interest and is worth describing in some detail. Certain of the field ambulances were still *en route* to the scene of operations, and it unfortunately happened that those divisions which were chiefly engaged and which suffered the majority of casualties were ill provided with medical units. There is no suggestion that this was due to negligence or want of foresight on the part of any individual. It was just unfortunate. The railways were groaning under the wheels of frequent troop-trains, as the situation urgently demanded that troops be sent to the north, to the line of the Sambre, there to join hands with the left of General Joffre's forces. How urgent was the call may be told in a few sentences. We therefore make a slight digression which may be of advantage just at this stage in our description of the movements of medical units. The military position as it affected the French and ourselves and the Belgians, can be summarised shortly, and will the better enable one to gather a clear impression of the general situation.

Massed along the western frontier of the German Fatherland were at least six armies, of which the First, Second, and Third lay approximately adjacent to Belgian territory. It was the violation of this territory which presented a *casus belli* between Great Britain and Germany, and here it was that serious fighting occurred before the arrival of British forces. We were mobilising our divisions when Liége fell, after a bloody if short struggle, in which the Walloon Belgians obstinately clung to their city and fortress. Once that fell, the banks and the valley of the Meuse were open, and there poured into Belgium divisions and corps which, swung from their left in the neighbourhood of Metz, had by August 20 reached (and entered) Brussels. Leaving a force to harry the Belgian army towards Antwerp, Von Klück commanding the First Army and Von Buelow

the Second, swung their forces in a south-westerly direction, still pivoted on Metz, surged up the valley of the Meuse, occupying the eastern towns of Belgium and later ravaging and wrecking the fairest cities, burning and destroying and shooting. Presently Namur fell, Charleroi, scene of many an old-time contest, was taken, and the Fifth French Army fell back over the Sambre.

Those events took place on August 23, when our First Corps was getting into position. Subsequently, defeat of the Fifth French Army and of others east of it caused our Ally to withdraw still farther. Thus, as French troops to the immediate east of Mons retired, British troops to their immediate west were digging in along a line which was becoming hourly more exposed and dangerous. As matters turned out, it would have been better had we waited farther south; but the future is a hidden page. The position then was urgent. If the German tide of invasion past Liége and Namur were to be stemmed, British troops must be moved to the left of the French Fifth Army; and therein lay the reason for sending fighting troops first, and good reason for the late arrival of certain medical units.

The misty morning of the 23rd of August found the cavalry field ambulances still plodding westward to Quievrain. Behind the 15th Infantry Brigade lay the 13th Field Ambulance. It had marched north in rear of the Fifth Division, being fêted by the inhabitants in every village as it passed from Le Cateau to Landrecies, and so to Dour. What a change just a few slender hours were to see brought about! Guns, guns, the sound of approaching guns, and on the paved roads the rumble of wagons moving southward, the clatter of many feet, and with the retiring divisions an ever-increasing band of unfortunate folk, old and young, the strong, the weak, the halt and the blind, doubtless those who had fêted these sturdy British soldiers.

Arrived at Dour, Major H. S. Thurston rapidly completed plans to deal with the situation. The 14th

and 15th Field Ambulances were still on the train *en route* to Valenciennes, and in fact did not detrain till August 23, and thus were unable to assist. The only possible course was to split the field ambulance, and this Major Thurston did, sending half a bearer subdivision to Boussu railway station in command of Major A. J. M'Dougall, and a similar party to Sardon, on the Thulin—Pommerœul Road. In this way, assistance was at hand for the 13th and 14th Infantry Brigades, though the other field ambulances, had they been present, would have been a welcome addition. For it was the Fifth Division, with the Third on its right, which was to bear the brunt of the Mons—Condé fighting. In the centre, at Dour, the field ambulance took over the girls' school, and soon had its equipment unpacked, its operating table set up, a kitchen preparing food, and wards cleansed and ready provided with paillasses.

No better fortune favoured the gallant Third Division as regards its medical units. The 7th Field Ambulance had alone reached the neighbourhood of Mons. The 8th and 9th were *en route* and expected any moment at Valenciennes. Lieut.-Colonel A. Kennedy, commanding the 7th Field Ambulance, halted "A" Section of his unit at Ciply, where was the headquarters of the 7th Infantry Brigade, and at once prepared for the reception of wounded in the school. "B" Section had already reached Cuesmes, where also a dressing station was opened for the 9th Infantry Brigade, while on the right "C" Section halted at Hyon and made ready for the reception of patients. Very soon these units became heavily engaged, for fighting about Mons began earlier and terminated later than in front of the Fifth Division, the enemy making desperate efforts to break through on the east and to drive a wedge farther west into an extending gap between the Third and Fifth Divisions.

Less interest attaches to the field ambulances of the other fighting units. By a curious coincidence all three of the field ambulances of the First Division were in

position by the morning of the 23rd, though they were scarcely called upon for assistance, seeing that the First Division was only very slightly engaged. The Second Division, like the Fifth and Third Divisions, had only one field ambulance present, the 4th, which was so soon to encounter misfortune. How many of the personnel of this field ambulance imagined as they traversed the wooded country near Landrecies on their way to the north-east that the place would become a sinister memory! We can dismiss further mention of this unit by stating that it was now in three sections, closely adjacent to, or in the town of Givry, where it had made ample arrangements for wounded.

Far west on the twenty-five-mile-long British front, there lay, it will be remembered, the 19th Infantry Brigade, which arrived after noon on the 23rd of August. Unfortunately, No. 19 Field Ambulance was not with it. "A" Section, which was to follow the brigade, was still *en route*, though "B" and "C" Sections were now at Landrecies, where, like the majority of the personnel of No. 4 Field Ambulance, a portion was to be taken prisoner shortly.

The situation elsewhere can be summed up in a few brief sentences. Six clearing hospitals were at St. Quentin, their equipment still on railway trucks, ready for a forward movement. A stationary hospital, No. 5, was at the same place, its personnel prepared to feed patients passing through on the railway, where the unit had a temporary hospital ready. No. 7 Stationary Hospital was there too, and had already opened hospital in the Lycée Henri Martin. Others of the stationary hospitals were making ready for patients at Havre, Rouen, Amiens, and Boulogne, or were *en route* to those destinations, where also general hospitals were already installed, except at Boulogne, or were making ready. At Amiens the ambulance train units were hastily equipping those trains of *fourgons de marchandise*, and in the case of those numbered one and two were already clattering over the rails towards St. Quentin.

The troops were set in order. The battle arrayed. The 23rd of August was to set the medical service on a course which would carry its various units through scenes of carnage and expose it to vicissitudes as intense as any ever experienced.

## CHAPTER IV

The battle of Mons–Condé—No. 7 Field Ambulance and the Third Division—No. 8 Field Ambulance—Analysis of the medical arrangements for Third Division—The horsed ambulance wagon—The motor ambulance as an alternative—No. 13 Field Ambulance and the Fifth Division—Record of the Fifth Division—The 19th Infantry Brigade and its medical arrangements—Medical units of the First Corps.

A damp, misty dawn heralded the opening of Sunday the 23rd of August. For a while a white veil lay over the still water in the canal, and hid the men in their trenches, blotting out Boussu and Dour and the mine-shafts to the south, and the wooded country in front in the direction of Ath, Nivelles, Brain le Comte, and other towns whence German columns were said to be marching.

Presently a drizzling rain fell and cleared the mist slightly. Just about then the companies of the Fifth Division across the canal were electrified by the sound of firing. It was a little affair of outposts, the 1st Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry having successfully ambushed a cavalry patrol. There was silence again. The men went on with their breakfasts, while farther east the First Corps dug hard to complete their trenches.

That outpost affair, repeated a thousand times during the progress of the war, under varying conditions and on many a front, provides a picture typical of British phlegm. Private Sambrook figures as the chief combatant. Three platoons of B Company of the Cornwalls had crossed the canal and had dug trenches round the buildings of Le Petit Crepin, thus securing a bridgehead, under the command of Second Lieutenant Savile. Private Sambrook and two comrades were sent forward

some 200 yards to act as outposts. It was 6 A.M. Damp mist hid all but immediate surroundings, but could not drown the sound of approaching horsemen. A strong officers' patrol of German dragoons rode all unsuspecting into Private Sambrook's party, then lying flat in the ditch beside the road. The Germans checked their horses. An officer seeing the British soldier snatched at his revolver, but Private Sambrook was ready and promptly shot him through the body. The German collapsed, the patrol swung round, and in a trice the mist had closed round them. Private Sambrook had the distinction of firing one of the first shots in the Great War for liberty and justice. Half an hour later the platoon behind caught another group of horsemen under their fire, and emptied a number of saddles.

A while later and the sound of heavy firing came echoing along the canal from the Condé end. This time it was the 4th Cavalry Brigade which had located enemy infantry advancing on Lock 3 in column of fours, a movement which the rifles of the troopers checked, putting about one hundred Germans out of action. Meanwhile, information came to hand which showed that enemy troops swarmed north of the canal, and that his patrols surrounded Tournai and were riding west beyond the left flank of the British Expeditionary Force. Farther east, where the flanks of Von Klück's First Army and Von Buelow's Second joined, strong columns of German troops of all arms were marching on Mons and Binche. Precisely what numbers were approaching cannot yet be stated, but even the enemy will not deny the fact that his numbers were enormously greater than those of the British.

At length, at 11.15 A.M., the storm broke. A cavalry and infantry attack was launched upon Nimy, the suburb outside Mons where the pickets of the 8th and 9th Infantry Brigades joined hands. This the 4th Royal Fusiliers repulsed handsomely, driving the enemy off with steady rifle fire. But only a short respite was allowed. The enemy brought guns into action, and

from that moment for many hours a tense struggle raged about this canal-bordered salient, from the Faubourg St. Barthélemy in the east to Jemappes bridge to the west, where an Homeric combat was fought for its possession. By 1.30 the fire had spread to the front of the Fifth Division, while the right of the 6th Infantry Brigade at Vellereille le Sec came under heavy high-explosive shell fire. Then by sheer weight of numbers the 8th and 9th Infantry Brigade pickets were driven in upon the main position, the 4th Middlesex Regiment putting up a magnificent fight which showed that the old fighting spirit of the British soldier was neither dead nor dormant. At Jemappes outposts furnished by the 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers were chiefly engaged, and, abandoning the bridge, were forced back upon Frameries. Unluckily the Royal Engineers failed to destroy the bridge.

It is not the purpose of this record of the R.A.M.C. to give each action in detail, though one is tempted to launch forth on a subject of entrancing interest. Our theme concerns the R.A.M.C., though it is reasonable to state that a clear description of general military movements makes those of the Medical Corps more transparent. A sentence, then, to complete the tale of these military operations. The forcing back of the left of the Third Division at Jemappes as far as Frameries, caused the whole division to fall back upon the 7th Infantry Brigade at Ciply, and a corresponding withdrawal of the Fifth Division to the line Wasmes—Dour, and of troops to the west behind the railway embankment which runs from Mons to Quievrain and southward. That dangerous gap at Frameries was filled by three battalions of the 5th Infantry Brigade, though by then darkness had fallen. Before this the enemy had pressed on just there, seizing every slag heap and mine dump and severely enfilading the 9th Infantry Brigade. But at nightfall firing died down, and then ceased. Pickets out in front of the British line were undisturbed. The Germans had drawn off to prepare for further movements

at dawn on the 24th. Thus began and ended this important operation.

It will be remembered that "A" Section of No. 7 Field Ambulance was at Ciply, where it had a dressing station ready. "B" was at Cuesmes behind the 9th Infantry Brigade with its dressing station open and its bearers prepared for action. Chief interest, however, attaches to Major T. E. Fielding's section—"C"—which was at Hyon. Lieutenant Vellacott was in charge of the dressing station here, and was ready early on the Sunday morning for any wounded who might be brought in. The bearers marched into Mons with Major Fielding and Lieutenant E. S. B. Hamilton, and threading their way through the crowded streets, where the people stood gaping at the sounds of battle and wondering and hoping, they passed through the barricades with which the north-eastern exits of the town were now protected, and marched up to the line of pickets. Here the men were under shrapnel fire, and a number of the 9th Infantry Brigade had fallen.

For some while the work of collecting, dressing, and transferring cases to the dressing station at Hyon continued. Meanwhile, Major Fielding rode through the city as far as the railway crossing near Nimy, and seeing some time later that the enemy pressure was increasing, he rode to Hyon and instructed Lieutenant Vellacott to evacuate his cases to any empty vehicles which might be passing.

"Rode back into Mons," he writes, "and met details of the 8th and 9th Infantry Brigades returning in comparative confusion, there being no officer present. Harangued them. . . . Many suffering from shell shock, some without arms and equipment."

Imagine the scene now as the ambulance wagons trundled south to Hyon, their drivers shouting to the people to clear the road. For the people of Mons had wakened to the true position. These lusty British troops whose coming had been such a source of satisfaction to them, were trudging back, going south, leaving the city. They were fighting and retiring from

behind the barricades, and enemy gun-fire was getting nearer.

Towards Nimy the enemy had made a deeper impression, and our troops had already been driven back upon the town when Major Fielding returned to his bearers and issued fresh orders. Walking wounded were to be sent on at once to Hyon dressing station; the ambulance wagons were to carry all stretcher cases for which there was accommodation; for the rest, "I ordered the bearers to dress and leave behind all seriously wounded for whom there was no accommodation in the ambulance wagons."

Lastly, he searched for Lieutenant Hamilton, who was missing. As a matter of fact this young officer had gone to the assistance of a wounded officer of the Gordon Highlanders, and following a cherished tradition of the service to which he belonged, had not hesitated to sacrifice his own safety. The story of his movements is as follows: The bearers were retreating towards Hyon with the men of the 8th Infantry Brigade along a road which runs east of Mons, when a message reached him that Major Simpson of the Gordons was wounded and in need of assistance. He at once turned back, and taking two bearers with him, went in search of the wounded officer. He found him with about fifty wounded men in a château belonging to M. Bouillart de St. Symphorien. The enemy was now very near, and as capture seemed imminent, he sent the bearers away, telling them to run for it, while he himself remained to attend to the wounded. When he had seen to all he made an effort to get away himself, and issuing from the château was fired on at close range by a party of the enemy, but fortunately escaped being hit. From the top windows of the château he watched German troops advancing towards Mons, and at night-time made another effort to return to the British Expeditionary Force. For hours he wandered about, coming upon the Germans every now and again, and finally arriving back at the château, where, on the morning of the 24th,

a German medical officer found his way. During Lieutenant Hamilton's absence German wounded had been brought in, and there were now nearly a hundred wounded in this château and the White Château, which was adjacent.

For a fortnight Lieutenant Hamilton remained working at these two châteaux, and was well treated during his stay. German medical officers whom he met treated him, as a general rule, with civility, and he was allowed to move about in Mons as he liked. In this way he was able to see numbers of British wounded in various hospitals in the town, the majority of whom were attended to by Belgian doctors under the direction of the German staff. Lieutenant Hamilton states that the wounded were well looked after. On September 5, just as the Retreat to Paris had ended, he was sent off to Germany with other officers of the R.A.M.C., Major H. W. Long, Captains H. M. J. Perry, and J. H. Graham, medical officers in charge of the 2nd Royal Irish Regiment, the 4th Middlesex, and the 1st Gordon Highlanders respectively of the 8th Brigade, and Captain C. T. Edmunds, medical officer in charge, 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers, of the 9th Infantry Brigade. Lieutenant Hamilton returned to England from Germany on January 12, 1915.

The bearers of Major Fielding's party kept to their work in admirable manner. They saw the main body of the 8th Infantry Brigade retire past them, and still worked on amongst the wounded. Then they were warned of the approach of the rear-guard. Only at that moment did Major Fielding march them away, at first to Hyon, and then, with Lieutenant Vellacott and a column of walking wounded holding on to the laden ambulance wagons, to Ciply, where the cases were transferred to "A" Section.

Precisely what happened in the northern angle of the Mons salient is not certain, but Lieut.-Colonel F. W. C. Jones, the A.D.M.S. of the Third Division, writes as follows :

Fighting lasted all day, resulting in very heavy casualties, the majority of which were left on the field owing to repeated retirement. Those wounded north of Mons were, however, collected and placed in the hospital there under the care of the Belgian Red Cross Society.

Thus in the northern angle they were lost, because the 8th and 9th Infantry Brigades fell back, or were collected and placed in the tender hands of the Red Cross. On the east they were succoured and sent to Hyon and thence to Ciply, or were abandoned for want of transport. On the west " B " Section of No. 7 Field Ambulance handled the situation near Jemappes. The section had fallen back upon Frameries, and presently the Scots Fusiliers were driven back through the position they had taken up. Upon this, the section collected and dressed the wounded, and loading them in their wagons transferred them to a Belgian Red Cross Hospital at Frameries. The dressing station there was then evacuated, and the section marched for Bavai with a load of wounded.

It was at Frameries that Captain Malcolm Leckie, R.A.M.C., the medical officer of the 1st Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers of the 9th Infantry Brigade, won the D.S.O. for his gallant and devoted conduct. Refusing to leave his battalion, he continued to attend to the wounded in spite of the fact that he himself was wounded, and in spite of the fire of the enemy. For this devotion he paid with his life, dying of his wounds, though he left a record behind him of noble service which all can appreciate.

No. 8 Field Ambulance was meanwhile struggling along the road from Valenciennes in the direction of Bavai, having set out at sunrise. It had been the intention of the officer commanding—Lieut.-Colonel C. A. Stone—to proceed directly east-north-east, but information came that Uhlans had cut the road, though a study of the general position discloses the fact that this was quite out of the question, and that it was probably some of our own cavalry patrolling in rear of

Estreux who had been mistaken by the civilians in the neighbourhood for enemy horsemen. A little later when the field ambulance had reached Wargnies le Grand on the main road to Bavai, they came upon Field-Marshal Sir John French. To quote Lieutenant Robinson, one of the officers of the Field Ambulance :

> I was leading my horse along the side of the road when I suddenly came across an officer whose face I knew. He was standing by a car watching our unit as it went by, and I was so astonished at recognising Sir John French, under whom I served for a long time in South Africa, that I entirely forgot to salute him.

Then the Field Ambulance marched on through the mine-field, receiving enthusiastic hospitality from the Belgians, who showered gifts of fruits, cigars, and other items amongst the personnel of the unit. Apparently the natives of that part had few misgivings as to the outcome of the operations, for again to quote the same officer :

> In a street of one of the villages we passed through I was marching beside a brother officer when two pretty girls passed us. One of them made a dash at G—— and insisted on giving him a handkerchief, which he accepted. Later on he found inside the handkerchief a note informing him of the donor's name and address, and asking him to write to her.

He concludes with a note of disgust, that no pretty girls ventured to present him with handkerchiefs !! One wonders whether those same pretty girls formed part of that frantic band of refugees who on the 24th swarmed out of the mine-field, from those blackened villages and from the midst of the dumps and shafts and chimneys, and pressed down the roads towards Le Cateau, obstructing the withdrawal of the weary Third and Fifth Divisions.

It was late when the ambulance reached Noirchain, carrying a few wounded. It had marched some thirty-four miles, and its teams were thoroughly done up.

No. 9 Field Ambulance was miles away still, and took no part in the action of the 23rd of August.

Analysis of the situation as it concerns the wounded of the Third Division is not very instructive, firstly, because there are no absolutely accurate returns of casualties suffered by the 8th and 9th Infantry Brigades on August 23, though they were not far short of 1000; secondly, because only one field ambulance, in place of three, was with the division. Had the other two been present those unfortunate fellows would not have been left in the Belgian Red Cross Hospital at Mons or Frameries, nor would others have been abandoned on the battle-field. Evacuation of wounded is a question not of transport alone but of bearer strength, in this action admittedly weak. But what if motor ambulances had worked in those August days with our mobile medical units! It is reasonable to suppose that numbers more would have reached England rather than Germany!

Then arises the question why was it that motor ambulances were not in regular use in August 1914? A glance into the past will supply the answer already partially given. The motor had passed its initial stage, had come to stay, and was already an article of extreme reliability. But it had not been universally adopted. In the army the value of motor lorries was recognised thoroughly. In civil life business firms and private people had taken to motor traction extensively. But many had not. Horses were not extinct like the dodo, nor likely to be, and motor vehicles as ambulances seemed unnecessary to a great number of hospitals. Why hurry the patient? A quiet, easy, steady journey would be better. But the position in the case of the medical service was far from similar. Even given moderate numbers of wounded to handle, the swiftness of their evacuation from the fighting front was a point of obvious importance, and putting aside the well-being of the wounded themselves, it was essential to the well-being of the army. Obviously motor transport was likely to be more effective than horsed. The motor ambulance at once suggested itself as a solution of possible difficulties, and as a matter of course the question of demanding

motor ambulances for field medical units had come up, we repeat, for decision, and had been strongly recommended.

But even if we allow that the General Staff had agreed in principle to the employment of motor transport for field medical units, there were other obstacles which operated against their issue. The British public was jealous and watchful of the expenditure on its naval and military services, and there had always been a party anxious to reduce the outlay on ships and men and guns and soldiers despite the danger such a course offered. No doubt the gigantic expenditure in which the war has plunged the country has cured the majority of them for ever, but, in 1914 and the years immediately preceding it they existed, they agitated, they made noisy protests, and the Army Council and the various departments concerned had to walk warily and perforce view additional expenditure for some new equipment of an experimental nature with no great enthusiasm. Hence the project was postponed, the need of motor ambulances was not absolutely demonstrated, and the recommendations of the Army Medical Department fell flat. Only Mons and the great Retreat revived them. The need was there. It was urgent. It was crippling units otherwise soundly organised and equipped. Maybe the voices of some of the retrenchment party were heard in the call now made for motor ambulance wagons. Who knows ? Some of them may even have gone to France to assist in the movement of wounded.

But no amount of enthusiasm could relieve on the instant what presently became a critical condition of affairs. It was not indeed until many precious weeks had passed, weeks filled to repletion with movement and fighting and a mass of casualties and loss of valuable lives that motor ambulance convoys and a free supply of motor ambulances were at last able to cope with the situation. Writing dispassionately of the transport of mobile units one can merely state the bitter facts. Intelligent anticipation on the part of a far-seeing Director-

General had produced a medical service capable of dealing with the casualties of an expeditionary force. Government parsimony and the narrow outlook of ignorant or perverse individuals had combined to limit the efficiency of its most vital article of equipment. The result was disastrous. It well-nigh wrecked the utility of an organisation otherwise efficient. The cost, small enough had it been met prior to the war, was increased tenfold, and the price was paid not in national gold, but with the lives and liberty of gallant soldiers—paid in full with bloody interest.

Yet it is hard to be wise beforehand, and in reviewing this question of the lack of motor ambulances during the first weeks of the war, it needs to compare the British Expeditionary Force and its medical service with the French and enemy forces and their medical services. In their case, too, the General Staffs had not advised the use of motor ambulances, and as a consequence we and our Allies, and the Germans also, had made almost precisely similar arrangements for the removal of wounded. That is to say, all had horsed ambulances and had organised a scheme whereby motor lorries of the Ammunition Column when returning empty might be made of service in an emergency. The bugbear of congested roads was now discovered to be actually a myth. Motor ambulances need not necessarily have been squeezed into those long retreating columns on the way from Mons, for, like the motor lorries, they could have gone by lateral roads, of which there were plenty. Their swiftness alone would have taken them out of the way of our troops, and likewise would have lessened the congestion occasioned by the presence of wounded. The Retreat, and the advance over the Marne may in fact be said to have yielded valuable lessons to the General Staffs of the armies, and certainly to that of Britain. The supply of motor ambulances was sanctioned. Their issue was hurried. They more than fulfilled all that was anticipated of them.

The tale of the Third Division is soon completed.

Reports available show that the division lost in killed, wounded, and missing, some 1000, including all ranks, though how many of the missing were killed or wounded or merely prisoners is not evident.

The R.A.M.C. itself has supplied no better record, but five regimental medical officers were missing when night fell.

The fortunes of No. 13 Field Ambulance with the Fifth Division now come under review. At Dour Major Thurston had all in readiness for the reception of wounded, and early in the morning sent out the two parties to which earlier reference has been made, the one to Boussu and the other to Sardon.

Boussu lies behind Ghislain, which was deluged with shells in the afternoon, so that the following note, culled from the diary of the officer commanding and having reference to the party at Boussu is probably a fair description :

> They returned to Headquarters at 12.45 A.M. on the 24th, bringing 2 officers and 7 other ranks in their single wagon. They had had an exciting time of it.

This is the only mention of the section. But there is some information of the 13th Infantry Brigade wounded. Shelling of Ghislain resulted in casualties, and a message reached Colonel R. H. S. Sawyer, the A.D.M.S. of the Fifth Division, that one hundred wounded lay at the station. Through some error this had come direct to Dour instead of to the section at Boussu, which was much nearer. However, Colonel Sawyer heard that there was a train at St. Ghislain and sent up a locomotive. The train, when it arrived, carried two officers and forty-one other ranks British and one German. Others were added, a medical officer put on the train, and the whole sent on to Amiens.

It was after this that the section at Boussu was driven out by shell-fire and retired with their single ambulance. They left forty-four wounded because of lack of transport. Meanwhile the section at Sardon rejoined, bringing in twenty wounded.

Casualties of the Fifth Division, like those of the Third, are inaccurately recorded. The returns showed some 400 of all ranks killed, wounded, and missing. There is no information as to the R.A.M.C. losses.

The actual fighting in which the division was engaged was of as strenuous a nature as that in which the Third Division took part, and undoubtedly caused heavy losses to the enemy. A mixed force of Germans debouched from the woods about 1.25 P.M., when the Third Division had already been hotly engaged for quite a time, and marched down on Des Herbières. Afterwards enemy columns thrust at various points till the gallant fellows of the 13th and 14th Brigades north of the canal were hard pressed to hold them. Rifles jammed that day with the heat of rapid firing. Men, fresh from the peaceful lanes of England and unused to war, looked down their sights and found not one or two Germans in their field grey. They were massed in bulk. "It was like shooting rabbits." Steady rolling waves of fire gave wonderful effect and filled the British soldier with elation. He came away from Mons with little better than contempt for German marksmanship, though German courage and discipline impressed him greatly.

The scene sweeps to the west. The 19th Infantry Brigade had taken over the line at noon and was soon in action near Lock 3, where a German machine-gun in the upper story of a house caused some losses; 4 other ranks were killed, and 1 officer and 12 men wounded.

It is not clear who dealt with these casualties. "A" Section of No. 19 Field Ambulance was detraining at Valenciennes while the action was in progress. Probably a cavalry field ambulance rendered the necessary assistance.

In the eastern theatre of operations little help was required by the field ambulances then present. We can dismiss the medical units of the First Division at once, as that division was only very slightly engaged.

The 4th Field Ambulance alone cared for the Second

Division, and its disposition has been mentioned. "A" and "B" Sections had pitched tents near Givry and sent the bearers to Harmignies, whence they came back in the evening bringing a few wounded. At this stage a section of No. 6 Field Ambulance arrived and took over the dressing station. The two sections of No. 4 Field Ambulance then marched to Bonnet, where they handed the wounded they carried to No. 6 Field Ambulance, which had opened a dressing station. "C" Section was in Givry, where a large barn was made ready for wounded, and hot drinks prepared. About fifty wounded were admitted. The sections stayed the night there "staring at the horizon toward the north-east which glowed in the light of many burning villages."

No. 5 Field Ambulance reached Bougnies about 3 P.M., and sent some bearers and an ambulance wagon to Harveng to fetch some wounded. It records no further incident, nor does the 5th Cavalry Field Ambulance appear to have been actively engaged in the action.

We leave the British Expeditionary Force fallen back behind Mons, its left flank withdrawn, German cavalry already threatening an envelopment there. Along the left centre lay the Fifth Division, back some distance behind the canal, and next to it three battalions of the 5th Infantry Brigade now filling the gap which the enemy had made on the left of the Third Division. A drive there on the evening of this first day of conflict might have broken the British Expeditionary Force into two halves. Perhaps the rifles of the sturdy Third and Fifth Divisions had given pause in the adventure, though it was again attempted on the morrow. The Third Division continued the line to Ciply, while to the east there was no change in the situation.

The 24th August was to see every medical unit south of the Mons coalfield and of the Belgian frontier *en route* to Maroilles—Landrecies and Le Cateau, where late on the 25th or early on the 26th their strength was to be painfully diminished.

# CHAPTER V

Monday, the 24th August—Fatigue of the Second Corps—Operations of the 24th — Bavai — Incidents at Bavai—Field Ambulances of the Third Division—Field Ambulances of the Fifth Division—The 25th August —Medical Units of the Second Corps.

THE roads south and west of the line held by the British Expeditionary Force on the night of the 23rd were packed with columns of vehicles—the baggage column of the army—long before dawn broke and a glorious sun came up on the morning of the 24th. A general retirement had been ordered, for the French Fifth Army on our right was falling back swiftly, and was already south of us, while enemy masses to our front were even stronger than those on the day just past.

Von Klück's Uhlans were now well beyond Tournai, riding through open country, with not a hostile force nearer than Valenciennes, near which our cavalry brigades lay, or Amiens, far to the west, where French Territorial divisions were assembling. It was high time for the British Expeditionary Force to retire. The 23rd had seen it in a dangerously exposed position, and the 24th found it in almost precarious plight, its left open to envelopment unless it were withdrawn quickly.

The operations of the day can be sketched in a few brief sentences. As regards the First Corps, it was a question of gradual retirement, covering the right of the Third Division. Neither of the two divisions of this corps was actively engaged, except in marching and digging, of which the men had had more than a fair share since they left the concentration area. They had, in fact, been on the road north for hours; few obtained

any rest on the night of the 22nd–23rd, for they were digging in, after a late arrival east of the Mons—Maubeuge Road, or were still marching. The 23rd still called for trench digging, and here on the 24th they were digging and marching again. No wonder that the corps was fatigued when it reached the Dompierre—Landrecies line on the evening of the 25th August.

Compare this strenuous work with that of the Second Corps units, digging along the Mons—Condé line after marching to that objective, with a stiff fight throughout the 23rd and more digging after a partial retirement; now, on the 24th more fighting, followed by a long weary march over indescribable roads packed with civilians and congested with vehicles. A brief halt and sleep on the Valenciennes—Bavai—Maubeuge Road, another grilling day with rearguard actions, and finally arrival in the neighbourhood of Le Cateau, dog tired, hungry, wet to the skin, too weary to care about eating.

That is the tale of the indomitable Third and Fifth Divisions. That, too, is the record of their medical units. Can one wonder that in spite of orders to continue the retreat on the 26th of August, Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien intimated to Sir John French that his divisions had been tried past endurance, that retreat was out of the question for the moment, and that the Third and Fifth Divisions, with the Fourth in company now, as well as the 19th Infantry Brigade, would give battle at Le Cateau?

Operations of the 24th August can be rapidly summed up. The Third Division was attacked at dawn, and desperate efforts were made by German Infantry to break through where the Third and Fifth Divisions joined hands. Having repulsed the enemy attempt, the Fifth Division began to retire as the day advanced, when the enemy marched from the line Quievrain—Quiverchain on Baisieux, threatening to envelop the left of the division. At this juncture the Cavalry division lent invaluable assistance; the 9th Lancers and a portion of the 4th Dragoon Guards charging till held up by

wire, while another portion of the 4th Dragoon Guards assisted their withdrawal from the cover of a farm, and the 3rd Cavalry Brigade, straddling the Ancre—Baisieux Road, made a dismounted attack. The Norfolks and Cheshires and the 119th Battery, R.H.A., who composed the Fifth Division flankguard, fought splendidly in this action.

Thereafter the divisions retired steadily upon their objectives, and having rested for a few short hours during the night of the 24th–25th on the Valenciennes—Bavai—Maubeuge line, pressed on to the objectives already mentioned. Finally it may be stated that rearguard actions were the feature of the 25th August, these and actions at Maroilles and Landrecies, to which the narrative returns later.

It will be convenient in continuing the tale of the field ambulances to deal with those of the Second Corps, of the 19th Infantry Brigade, and of the Fourth Division now arriving near Busigny, and forming with the 19th Infantry Brigade the nucleus of the Third Corps, and also with those of the Cavalry division.

"A" and "C" Sections of No. 7 Field Ambulance at their dressing station at Ciply were under fire at 6 A.M. of the 24th, but held on till ordered at 3 P.M. to move south *via* Genly to Bavai. They retired then, picking up wounded as they went, and on arrival at Bavai transferred two officers and thirty-four men to a French hospital. A R.A.M.C. officer accompanied these wounded, and later was assisted by two officers of No. 8 Field Ambulance in dressing the cases. This officer remained all night and was captured by the Germans on the following morning. Thence, with the missing "B" Section now in company, No. 7 Field Ambulance moved south-west of Bavai, and at night had divided into three portions, one, the bearer division in charge of Major Fielding, on the Bavai—St. Waast Road, and the other two consisting of the tent division divided into two parties, the one at Amfroipret, the other at Gommegnies. This division had been effected in

order to prepare for casualties, but there was no longer any fighting, though congestion of the roads prevented the three parties coming together. The bearer division did not as a matter of fact rejoin the tent division until the 8th September.

The 8th Field Ambulance, having retired quite leisurely from Noirchain, reached Bavai and sent two medical officers to assist at the French hospital, and at night bivouacked on the road to Le Quesnoy. Here is a picture of the road from the pen of a junior officer with the unit:

> The road was absolutely jammed. Transport could only move a few yards at a time without halting.

And here further notes from Lieutenant Robinson, the officer previously quoted, who was one of the two left in Bavai assisting to dress wounded:

> As I was crossing the street a tall officer with a staff cap came up to me and said:
>
> "Oh! you're a doctor! Come along with me."
>
> He took me into the principal hotel in Bavai, where he showed me a major of the Gordon Highlanders lying in an easy-chair; he was shot through the shoulder, and the Colonel who accosted me said:
>
> "I want to know whether this officer can be taken thirty miles in a motor car?"
>
> The Gordon major's wounds had been dressed, so this was rather a difficult question. However, he was a big, powerful man, and after feeling his pulse and taking stock of him, I said:
>
> "It is most undesirable that this officer should be moved; you must give me an idea how great the urgency is."
>
> This was an artful attempt to extract a little information from the Staff on the military situation, but the tall officer was quite equal to the occasion. He smiled and said:
>
> "You must take it from me that I want to send him, and I want to know whether he will survive the journey. I cannot tell you more than that."
>
> I said: "I think he will survive the journey, but I do not think he ought to try it unless the need is very great."

At that they parted, and to quote a little further:

As I was leaving the hotel I asked a subaltern who the Staff Colonel was.

"Oh!" he said, "that's Colonel Seely, the late Minister for War."

It is interesting to hear from this officer that the wounded major of the Gordons got through quite safely, because a couple of years later he saw an announcement of his marriage.

Here is another rather pathetic picture this diarist paints for us:

Just as I left the hotel a Frenchwoman asked me to see a wounded English officer in her house. I went with her into a house close by, and found a young artillery subaltern who had been wounded just on one side of the bridge of his nose. He was coughing up blood, and I could feel the bullet which had wounded him under the skin of his neck not far above the collar-bone. He had lost a good deal of blood and was in a state of great nervous excitement. All the poor boy could think of was his two guns, which he had got safely away from Mons. He had not been able to rejoin his battery or to report the saving of his guns, and his one anxiety was to let his major know that he had got the guns away. It was obviously impossible to let the poor boy travel except upon an ambulance wagon—of which there were none available at that time—so I gave him a dose of morphia, reassured his anxiety about the guns, and did my best to cheer him up before I left him. Whether he was left in Bavai, or whether, later on, any one was able to take him away, I never found out.

The fellow field ambulance of the two already enumerated, No. 9, had not yet joined its division. It marched from Valenciennes and, reaching Hon, moved just north of the Belgian border where fighting was in progress. The main unit then retired to Gommegnies, leaving "C" Section bearer subdivision in command of Major W. E. Hudlestone and Captain F. E. Roberts, who were speedily in action just north of Sars-la-Bruyere. Later they were called to Blaregnies, where wounded were collected. At 2 P.M. they were ordered to Malplaquet, and finally Captain Roberts reached Bavai with sixteen wounded, which the French hospital could not accommodate. "C" Section then moved south-west and

bivouacked beside the bearer division of No. 7 Field Ambulance. Major Hudlestone had remained behind with three ambulance wagons and did not leave Hon till 8 P.M., when the last of the infantry had passed him.

"Troops, chiefly of the Third Division, in full retreat on Bavai," he says.

Carrying wounded, he reached Bavai, and transferred seventeen of them to a Red Cross Hospital. By now his horses were exhausted, so that he parked in the streets of Bavai.

The movements of the three field ambulances of the Fifth Division do not provide matter of unusual interest during the day in question. The Thirteenth marched from Dour at 11 A.M. on the 24th, and reached Amfroipret at midnight. It was not a very long march, but constant halts on a congested road delayed it. The unit left Lieutenant P. P. Butler (T.C.) and a bearer subdivision in the neighbourhood of Wasmes, and Lieutenant M. K. Nelson and two men near Élouges, where they had gone to retrieve some wounded. None of these were seen again during the retreat to Paris, though it will be seen when the doings of the 4th Field Ambulance are inspected that Lieutenant Butler and his party of twenty men joined that ambulance just prior to its entry into Landrecies, and fell prisoner to the Germans.

One incident of the day concerning the Officer Commanding this ambulance gives an astonishing contrast. The roads were crammed with marching, sweating soldiers. The colliery villages by the way had added to the numbers. The Belgians were fleeing, the women filled with a nameless terror, the men stolid, anxious, angry, craven, according to their disposition. British soldiers carried children on their shoulders and helped trembling mothers along. Young girls pushed go-carts in which were piled household treasures, brothers, sisters, even infirm old people. Houses were abandoned, doors left wide open to the invaders, and everywhere

was haste, fear, terror, and excitement. The Officer Commanding, worn out by long effort and parched after a long march and much strenuous talking, caught sight of a wayside house—a mansion, perhaps the property of a mining magnate. He rode up the drive, dismounted, and hammered on the door. Outside the gates was a seething, struggling mass of frantic civilians. Here, within the encircling wall of the château garden, peace reigned, and there was no sign of excitement. The door opened. A butler, immaculately dressed, silver-haired, smiling a welcome, bowed to the British officer. What did monsieur wish! Something to drink? Wine? No! Then beer? Why, certainly, monsieur. The man bowed an apology and hurried off. In a minute he was back, silver salver in hand, a beaker of foaming ale on it. As the Officer Commanding drank thirstily the sound of a tramping host came over the drive in at the door of the château. But the butler smiled and filled the tankard again, smiled and bowed monsieur down the steps to the drive. He closed the door quietly, and shut out the sight of retiring troops as if he had never noticed the movement. Maybe that very night he served beer from the self-same beaker to German officers. Perhaps four years of captivity and of German orders have made him regret his complacency on that August day in 1914. Yet he was a friend in need. The Officer Commanding mounted, rode out of the peace of the château garden, and plunged once more into the seething swirl of the retreat.

That retreat took this particular unit to a point south of the Valenciennes—Maubeuge Road, where, shaking itself free of the press along the road and disentangling its wagons, it finally halted, for the night as all hoped, and with that thought in mind began to prepare an evening meal. Then a Staff Officer galloped up and gave peremptory orders for an immediate move to the east, telling the Officer Commanding that he was in danger of capture by the enemy, who were approaching from the west. The weary unit once again took the

road and tramped east through villages now clear of the British. Only forlorn and dazed French folk remained, they and the veterans of 1870, who composed their Gardes Civiles.

"It was a pathetic sight," says Major Thurston, "to see these fine old soldiers drawn up at the exit of each village, saluting us bravely and sadly as we passed."

The remaining field ambulances of this division, of the 19th Infantry Brigade, and of the Cavalry division, struggled south to the neighbourhood of Villereau and Jenlain under conditions similar to those experienced by the 13th Field Ambulance. That is to say, they marched with the column, hemmed by refugees, keeping their personnel and vehicles together with much effort. When at length they outspanned their teams they had marched some thirty miles, and the horses were positively unable to proceed farther.

Major T. H. J. C. Goodwin of No. 4 Cavalry Field Ambulance, now Lieutenant-General Sir John Goodwin and the present Director-General of the Army Medical Service, provides some notes which give a graphic idea of prevailing conditions.

He says, writing of the evening of the 23rd :

> As we passed through Quievrain the church bells tolled, I presume as a warning to the townspeople that the allied troops were being forced back, and the scene was pitiable in the extreme, the people rushing out of the houses with bundles in their hands, women fainting in the streets, and a general exodus pouring southwards. We arrived at Audregnies at 1 A.M. on August 24, little realising that this was the commencement of the much-talked-of retreat from Mons !

Of the following evening he gives some further information :

> The conviction was being unwillingly forced on us that, unless appearances were false, our troops were being vastly outnumbered ; both rifle and artillery fire of the enemy appeared to preponderate to an enormous extent over our own, and our troops appeared to be absolutely overwhelmed by a vastly numerical superiority of the enemy.

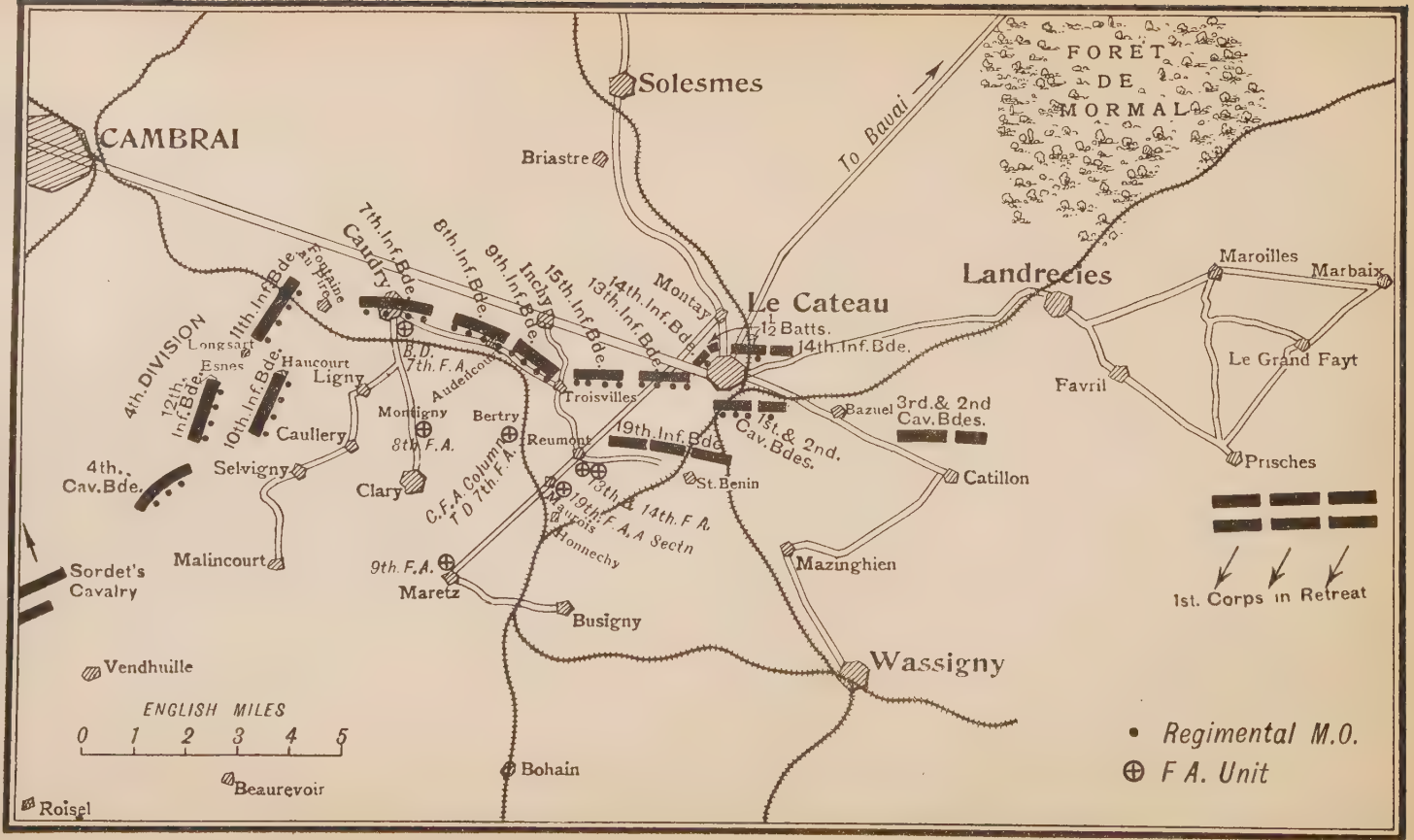
Few words are required with which to narrate the doings of the British Expeditionary Force and its field ambulances on the 25th August, for rearguard actions were the feature of this comparatively uneventful day which was to bring the British divisions back to a wooded and enclosed country, out of the smoke-stacks and winding-gear and coal-pits of the Mons area to the valley of the Sambre with its picturesque stone-built villages, its farms, its meandering streams, and its green coppices. Yet the R.A.M.C. marching with the First Corps were, like their comrades with the Second Corps, more than fully engaged with the sick and wounded who had accumulated in Bavai and elsewhere, and were hard put to it to deal with the numerous stragglers who fell out during the withdrawal. For the same reason medical units of the Third and Fifth Divisions had little rest on the night of the 24th and 25th, for while the fighting troops snatched a few hours sleep, the R.A.M.C. were hard at work in their dressing stations. The same applies to the medical units of the First Corps. There was no sleep for them while sick and wounded were in their units; men must be attended to and fed, and the question of evacuation claimed their attention.

They struggled south, picking stragglers up here and there, dressing wounded whom they found by the wayside, and so finally reached the objectives of their divisions. At varying hours the 1st Brigade marched into Dompierre, the 2nd to Marbaix, and the 3rd to Le Grand Fayt. The 4th Infantry Brigade reached Landrecies, where it will be met again in the action which was fought there, and with it the R.A.M.C.; for two at least of the medical units were to meet with misfortune in the aftermath of that action. Not very far away the 6th Field Ambulance was to march with the 6th Brigade into Maroilles, and here again we shall discover the R.A.M.C. doing strenuous work under the most difficult conditions. Noyelles, not so far off, was the objective of the 5th Infantry Brigade. One

interesting point has to be added. As if there was not sufficient congestion on the roads, French poilus of the Fifty-third Division were now marching with the First Corps columns, and every now and again the march was halted and the columns broken by the passage of Sordet's Cavalry Corps, which was passing through to the exposed west flank of the British Army.

The Forest of Mormal divided the lines of retreat of the First and Second Corps; for the First Corps marched south to the east of the forest, while the Fifth Division marched immediately on its west, the Third Division being still farther west. With their field ambulances joined in the column, jostling one another along a road packed three deep with vehicles and congested with troops and refugees, these two divisions of the Second Corps gained Le Cateau at varying hours during the afternoon, evening, and night of the 25th, and with them came the 19th Brigade and the Cavalry Division, the Fourth Division following later, for it had now arrived in the area of operations, and the retreating divisions passed through its outposts.

It was a strenuous day for field ambulances and medical officers generally; what with the press and the extraordinary fatigue of the men, what with numerous delays on the road and calls for assistance, their time was more than fully occupied. If the gallant troops of the Second Corps were weary, so also were the personnel of its medical units. Men fell asleep by the wayside at every halt. Those officers and men of the R.A.M.C. who had taken part in the Mons—Condé action, and had toiled south on the 24th to the Valenciennes—Bavai—Maubeuge Road, had had even less sleep than had the fighting units. True, the latter had dug and fought and marched and dug again; the medical units had picked up their wounded, had gathered their sick, and when the noise of battle died down, had been busy in their dressing stations, with lamps flaring overhead, dressing the wounded, operating on the serious cases, making




BATTLE POSITIONS AT LE CATEAU.

all as comfortable as possible, and feeding all who came to them for assistance.

So it was that on the 25th the R.A.M.C. stumbled along the roads with eyes staring for want of sleep, pushing on in the press, determined to do as well as their fighting comrades. Finally they stumbled into Le Cateau or into the positions to east and west of that provincial town, and drenched to the skin, hungry in the majority of cases, they threw themselves down on the ground round their ambulance wagons, too tired even to care about eating, their sole desire to get sleep. So weary were the officers and men of the Second Corps and of the 19th Infantry Brigade, so worn out were their medical units that the morning of the 26th found them almost incapable of further movement. They had snatched perhaps two or three hours' sleep. Men of the R.A.M.C. lay that night on the sopping pavements in Le Cateau with their comrades stumbling over them. Then as the dawn of the 26th broke and they wakened and moved their tired limbs, they knew that retreat for them was practically out of the question. They must fight it out.

So once again the staunch Third and Fifth Divisions, the 19th Brigade and the Fourth Division—a comparatively fresh unit—entered into Homeric combat, and once more the medical units opened dressing stations behind the firing-line, sent out their bearers, and made ready to treat the wounded. The description of the action at Le Cateau will show how well these men did, and how, though dog-tired, they struck such a blow that the German pursuing forces were halted.

Of the medical units of the Third Division of the Second Corps the 7th Field Ambulance had split on the night of the 24th into three portions; one, the bearer division under Major Fielding, and the other two the halves of the tent division. The press on the road prevented these sections coming together, though a few from the bearer division were sent forward and joined one of the tent divisions just before it moved from

its camp. This half of the tent division moved on to Vendregnies and finally gained Troisvilles, which is a little to the west of Le Cateau, as darkness was falling. The second half, with whom marched Major G. T. K. Maurice, lost touch entirely with the half which had preceded it, and at midnight struggled into Inchy, which is on the main road from Le Cateau, perhaps a mile north of Troisvilles. Later it discovered the whereabouts of the subdivision which had preceded it, and marched to join it. The bearer division, meanwhile, moved off in a great hurry, fearing capture, for the enemy were now quite close. At Solesmes at 3.45 in the morning they halted and picked up many footsore men. Here for the first time Major Fielding was able to enumerate his company, and found that three officers and forty men were present, ten ambulance wagons, a water-cart, and one medical store cart. They were shelled, and hurried out of the town just as the church tower fell. Thence they marched with the 3rd Worcesters and the 1st Wiltshires till Caudry was reached. They were now on the left flank of the division, where later on there was considerable fighting. At nightfall the 7th Infantry Brigade was relieved by units of the Fourth Division. Dawn of the 26th was near at hand, and soon after the bearers of the 7th Field Ambulance were engaged in the battle of Le Cateau.

The movement south of the 8th and 9th Field Ambulances needs no special mention. They kept gamely along the congested roads and finally gained, the former Troisvilles, where was a section of No. 7 Field Ambulance, and the latter Busigny, both in the neighbourhood of Le Cateau.

Medical units of the Fifth Division made their way toward the same destination, and in course of time, after a terribly trying march, outspanned at Reumont, in the case of the 13th and 14th Field Ambulances, and at a point just south of Troisvilles in that of the 15th.

"A" Section of No. 19 Field Ambulance reached Le Cateau *via* Solesmes at ten o'clock at night. It had

come along with the 19th Infantry Brigade and had been marching since 4 A.M. At Haussy the column was attacked, and retired under shrapnel fire, but there is no mention of wounded having been admitted to the ambulance. On arrival at Le Cateau it proceeded to the school and made ready to receive patients.

"B" and "C" Sections, which were with the First Corps, marched to Landrecies in two parties; one through the Forest of Mormal, escorted by a platoon of Cameron Highlanders. They had quite an exciting journey, for on several occasions there were alarms, and patrols of the enemy came very near them. The second party reached Landrecies before the first, and evacuated cases which it found in a hospital there to an ambulance train. Preparations were now made to receive wounded, for firing could be heard to the west of the town. This increasing, the bearers were sent out to the scene of the conflict. That operation, and the wounded resulting from it, will be referred to under the heading of Landrecies.

One can rapidly dismiss the medical units of the Fourth Division—which latter had only just arrived upon the scene—by stating that they were not present. They were still *en route* or at the base. It followed, therefore, that the Fourth Division, arriving last of the five now constituting the British Expeditionary Force, was worse off for medical units than any of the divisions which had preceded it. It had absolutely no medical personnel other than its regimental units and the medical staff of the division. How these dealt with the wounded, and faced an extraordinarily difficult situation, will be described in due course. Fortunately a full record of the Le Cateau action as it concerns the Fourth Division has been left for us by Major H. Ensor, the D.A.D.M.S. of the division. The field ambulances of this division were Nos. 10, 11, and 12, the first of which detrained at St. Quentin but a few hours before the battle of Le Cateau opened, while No. 11 arrived there on the previous night and, by what would appear to have been

an error, was put on a train which took it far away from the scene of conflict, and as the battle raged along the line Le Cateau—Selvigny the ambulance was drawing near Amiens, where of course it was useless. No. 12 Field Ambulance, like No. 10, was at St. Quentin.

The medical staff, however, was with the division, and Colonel C. E. Faunce and Major H. Ensor, R.A.M.C., the A.D.M.S. and D.A.D.M.S. respectively, waited at Briastre on the day in question, the 25th August, listening, as they tell us, to the sound of guns drawing nearer from the direction of Valenciennes.

Medical units of the Second and Third Corps, which have just been referred to, passed strenuous hours during the 25th of August as they fought their way south-west, travelling along those roads packed with troops and civilians, and constantly keeping a wary eye open for stragglers, of whom there were considerable numbers. They had often much ado to keep moving themselves and to look to the personnel of their own units. One can imagine how that confusion and press on the roads became accentuated as darkness fell. Medical officers with the ambulances give us occasional glimpses of their feelings, and carefully perusing the notes they have supplied one can paint a picture which is most moving. Those roads leading to Le Cateau became more and more wedged as the town was neared, and as they converge and pour, as it were through the neck of a bottle, into the market-square of the town. The congestion became impossible; units were broken up, portions of field ambulances lost one another, and the cavalry field ambulance column moving along towards the town was broken by the chance passing through of guns and De Lisle's Cavalry Brigade; so effectually broken indeed that one half managed to push its way through the throng into Le Cateau, where it worked all night tending wounded, while the other went west of the town, the press being too great for it to gain entry, the divided cavalry field ambulances seeing nothing more of one another till the retreat to Paris was ended.

Major Goodwin, marching with this column, has left us some idea of the comparative conditions of the British Expeditionary Force and the enemy forces. At some village to the north of Le Cateau he clambered into the belfry of a church and unslung his glasses.

I am not exaggerating when I say that the whole face of the country appeared to be a moving army, masses on masses of infantry, column after column of artillery, and tens of thousands of cavalry, extending into the distance as far as our glasses could reach, and pressing relentlessly forward on our tiny army, the few troops of which to our immediate front appeared as if they would be swept off the earth just as a slate is wiped by a sponge. Late in the evening it commenced to rain, and we arrived at Le Cateau at 7.30 P.M., pitch dark, rain falling in torrents, every one beat to the world, every wagon full of wounded and the heavy rumble of artillery coming steadily nearer, while now and then a shell would drop close to us. I say that we were tired; well, it was but early in the Mons retreat, but I would ask you to remember that the officers, at all events, had only had at the outside twenty-four hours' rest in the last six days, an average of four and one-half hours in every twenty-four, and that we were undergoing severe physical exertion.

It is not to be wondered, then, that if field ambulances were affected so also were the fighting troops; men unwittingly broke away from their companies in the darkness and wandered aimlessly along the paved streets of Le Cateau, jostling with frightened citizens; others threw themselves down anywhere, even on the pavements, and slept the sleep of utter exhaustion, slept in spite of drenching rain and sopping paths, and in spite of dozens of men who stumbled over their figures.

The night of the 25th August, and the very early morning of the 26th, saw, in fact, this left half of the British Expeditionary Force on the high road to exhaustion, its officers and men utterly weary from want of sleep, yet game as ever, the spirit of discipline and the unconquerable courage of its men keeping it together.

It would be idle to suggest that the personnel of the R.A.M.C.—officers and men—were not likewise affected. They had toiled in their own way as had the fighting

units. Medical units had taken part in those same trying marches and had secured even less sleep, for the wounded must receive attention. Whether bearers or members of the tent divisions, they had laboured to bring in wounded or to dress those who came, and to make them comfortable. Those terrible marches along packed roads had provided much work for them, and the elements of rain, darkness, and confusion generally had tended to affect them as well as others.

Yet medical units of the Second and Third Corps had reached their objective with little loss so far, were still actively engaged in their duties, and on the morrow were to give real succour to those who suffered in the action at Le Cateau.

The teams of the ambulance wagons may have been, and were in point of actual fact, nigh foundered; but the R.A.M.C., dog-tired like the rest of their comrades, were as game as they, and were up and doing very early on the 26th of August.

## CHAPTER VI

First Corps medical units—Evacuation by motor lorry—Refugees on the roads—Ambulance trains at Aulnoye stormed—Evacuation from Aulnoye and elsewhere—The soldier and blistered feet—No. 6 Field Ambulance—Maroilles—Landrecies.

Follow the movements of the R.A.M.C. marching with the First Corps on the 24th and 25th August on roads packed three deep, with columns stretching for miles into the distance, men and beasts sweating in the sun, dust and heat reducing every one to exhaustion, and behind the rearguards, withdrawing steadily and in perfect order, occasional rifle firing, the sound of cavalry patrols holding off a pursuing enemy.

Joined in the column the field ambulances struggled south. The 1st had divided, and its bearer division marched with the 1st Infantry Brigade. Its tent division had gone ahead at an early hour with the baggage column. At Hautmont it treated a host of men, mainly for blistered feet. What wonder! They had marched forty long miles since the 21st August, and had dug the soil of Belgium deep and often. Wonder was that blistered hearts and broken courage was not their complaint.

The 2nd Field Ambulance reached Feignies without incident and without admitting a single patient. The 3rd gained Neuf Mesnil, having had nothing of importance to report.

Medical units of the Second Division provide few items to attract attention. The 4th Field Ambulance, already nearing the scene of its capture, reached Aymeries. Its sections had come together at La Longueville, and some fifty wounded were in the ambulance wagons.

The 5th marched into Bavai, and the 6th, having recalled its sections from Givry and evacuated all but two of its cases by means of a motor lorry, marched to La Longueville. Here the bearer division rejoined bringing seventeen wounded. One of these poor fellows died where the field ambulance was halted. He was a gunner of the 70th Battery, Royal Field Artillery, and having laid him in the adjacent cemetery the ambulance moved on to Pont-sur-Sambre, where once more it put its wounded on to a motor lorry.

One wonders what was the fortune of those wounded evacuated by empty motor lorries which happened to pass our field ambulances when laden with wounded. Mere mention of it gives one to think a little furiously. Yet removal of wounded in motor lorries was a common enough occurrence in 1918. It may be stated that this useful vehicle has many a time now proved a boon to the medical staff of our armies. But—and the reservation should be accentuated—it has proved its utility by evacuating only a selected class of case, the very lightly wounded able to support a journey less comfortable than that provided by a motor ambulance.

The use of the motor lorry in 1914 appears to have been in the nature of a compromise in the matter of equipping field medical units with motor ambulances. The army already had motor-propelled vehicles, but not ambulances, and here was an opportunity to stave off a difficult question. A scheme was devised whereby the R.A.M.C. might have a call upon empty motor-propelled supply lorries returning to railhead to evacuate sick and wounded. Tested on manœuvres with dummy patients it gave great promise. But it had two defects which damned it. Empty motor lorries were not always available. Frequently they were not obtainable, and often enough their arrival was uncertain. And then they were for the conveyance of all classes of cases, the man with a finger wound and the unfortunate fellow with a fractured thigh.

One can express no surprise that the scheme was

promptly suppressed toward the end of September 1914, once motor ambulances became available, though when classification of cases had become a fine art, as it commenced to be before Neuve Chapelle, in 1915, then the scheme triumphed. It provided a ready and comfortable means of clearing the lightly wounded.

So much for evacuation by motor lorry. It brings us to evacuation by ambulance train and scenes which will live in the memory of all those who participated in them.

Bavai was filling with wounded, and on the night of the 24th there was considerable congestion. Colonel H. N. Thompson, the Assistant Director of Medical Services of the Second Division, reached the town late, having lost sight of his field ambulances altogether. But he had news of the wounded in Bavai, and had already caused messages to be sent to St. Quentin directing an ambulance train to come to Aulnoye, some miles south-east of Bavai. Thither he sent the sick and wounded in the hospitals at Bavai in every sort of conveyance, requisitioning every description of vehicle, and there they and the ambulance wagons of the First and Second Divisions converged on the morning of the 25th.

The roads were packed with troops and civilians. Old folks and young trudged towards the railway. Some pushed hand-carts, wheelbarrows, and perambulators. Here was a woman beset by weary children. There an aged dame trundled along in a go-cart. Some went to the extent of driving flocks and herds with them. Others contented themselves with portable articles of value. It is hard, cruelly hard to leave the fruits of a lifetime of work to the despoiler. But harder still to sacrifice liberty, perhaps life, to the invader. They surged toward the railway, they blocked the approaches to the station, mad with fear of the Germans they stormed the trains waiting to evacuate them, and finding the accommodation scanty, forced their way into those sorry *fourgons de marchandise* upon which British

ambulance train units had emblazoned the Red Cross of Geneva.

"Great difficulty experienced in loading the train owing to enormous crowd of refugees which poured into the station where trains were being prepared for them," writes Major C. D. Myles, R.A.M.C., in command of No. 2 Ambulance Train. "Very many boarded the ambulance train, and had actually to be pulled out."

No. 1 Ambulance Train had arrived some hours earlier and had admitted three officers and twenty-six other ranks. But the stream of sick and wounded coming down the road from Bavai had not yet arrived. All was in readiness for them, and No. 2 Ambulance Train was lying in the siding from whence it would be moved to the platform when No. 1 Ambulance Train was full and had departed. But of a sudden No. 1 Train moved off without notice to Major E. W. W. Cochrane, who was in command of it. Perhaps in the general confusion there was some misunderstanding; it may be that an interpreter would have assisted matters, or perhaps the rush of those frantic refugees and the song of the guns in the distance affected the nerve of the engine-driver. In any case, in spite of protests it went off, leaving three of the personnel behind.

No. 2 Ambulance Train now took its place and admitted 393 cases. The refugees were still seething about the station, and the thud of guns was growing louder. Major Myles waited till the British rearguard was crossing the railway bridge, when he was warned that he might be captured. The train therefore steamed away; at Landrecies it halted to take on many more wounded, amongst whom was a large proportion of officers. At Busigny there were more. Here trucks containing the equipment of No. 1 Stationary Hospital and the personnel were attached, and the whole went off to Amiens, halting at intervals to allow the staff to proceed from truck to truck to feed and dress their patients. At Amiens seventeen of the worst cases

were taken off, and later the ambulance train reached Rouen, discharging its precious freight to No. 5 General Hospital.

This does not complete the description of train evacuation. Cases were put on truck trains and in ordinary carriages at Maubeuge and elsewhere. Then the balance was loaded in the ambulance wagons of field ambulances in that neighbourhood, and the vehicles creaked on in those closely packed columns.

Colonel Thompson, the A.D.M.S. of the Second Division, describes the weariness of the rearguard of the 4th Infantry Brigade, many men of which had been inoculated for enteric less than a week before. So fatigued were these fine fellows that the A.D.M.S. ordered them to discard their packs, and thus freed they stepped on more briskly. Amongst them were posted ambulance wagons of the 6th Field Ambulance, in which relays of the men rode when exhausted. Finally the column marched wearily into Maroilles. Here, as the light faded, there was severe fighting. It provides a tale of intense interest for the R.A.M.C., for one officer alone found himself by the mere fortune of war in charge of our wounded. Enemy troops passed him by. French troops swept them back, and the tide of war ebbed for long hours. Other members of the R.A.M.C. strayed into the little town which was so soon to be ravished, and then came capture, imprisonment for a while, and later an escape which is recounted in the description of the action at Maroilles.

The movements of the First Corps field ambulances now again claim attention. Medical units of the First Division marched with the column, which went by way of roads east of the Forest of Mormal, their tent divisions with the baggage train, their bearer divisions with the infantry brigades, and with each, four ambulance wagons. French infantry began to join the column, and soon a number of the Fifty-third French Division were mingled with British soldiers. At Taisnières there was panic and pandemonium.

"Arrived here just as an alarm was sounded," says Colonel G. Cree, A.D.M.S., First Division. "The inhabitants rushing to and fro, thoroughly scared."

At length the field ambulances struggled into the places they were to rest in. During the day they had picked up numbers of exhausted men, and for this purpose had placed their ambulance wagons at intervals along the column. Some seventy rode to their bivouacs in this way, and of these fifty-six were sent off on a motor lorry when the field ambulances reached Marbaix. Blistered feet were the curse of the British soldier at this stage in the retreat. Numbers of men were treated *en route* and went back to their formations.

The 1st Field Ambulance finally reached Dompierre, the 2nd Marbaix, the 3rd Le Grand Fayt. This unit carried one officer and twenty-eight ordinary ranks.

A description of the movements of No. 4 Field Ambulance carries the narrative to Landrecies, and in a round-about manner to Maroilles, where in each case matters of moment with regard to the R.A.M.C. have to be recounted. The other two field ambulances of the Second Division are for this reason selected first for description. The Fifth left Bavai for Aulnoye and forced a passage for itself into the station, where it transferred its cases to the ambulance train. At 4 P.M., having been *en route* since 3.45 A.M., it gained Noyelles. Floods of rain were pouring upon the men. There was the faint thud of the guns in the far distance. Then their horses stampeded.

When the confusion was ended the unit found itself alone. No troops were to be found. It was raining and cold and getting dark. Somewhere towards midnight the 5th Infantry Brigade came near, and turning north marched back towards Pont-sur-Sambre. The field ambulance sent eight of the ambulance wagons with it.

The 6th Field Ambulance reached Maroilles at 5 P.M. Here there was an alarm, and they cleared from the town to the fields outside. But at 10 P.M. they were

back and opened a dressing station in the Hôtel de Ville, where fourteen wounded were admitted. But quite a number of casualties had been suffered by the Berkshires at the bridge which crosses the river. In the darkness there appears to have been confusion. Field ambulances were ordered out of the town, and No. 6 now harnessed up and moved to Prisches. Here a cavalry patrol brought a message from the A.D.M.S. asking for assistance, and straightway two officers and twelve men with some ambulance wagons turned back towards Maroilles and plodded through the rain and darkness toward that town. But they failed to reach it that night. They made the town on the following morning, to find the officer we have referred to in sole charge of the wounded ; and with them the party was captured. Some of these officers were incarcerated in the pest-house of Wittenberg, in which were also other R.A.M.C. officers, and one of them returning to England with his tale of typhus and German prison conditions caused the Government to publish the details broadcast. The document is one to which we shall refer later. It should be read and remembered by those who would wish at a future date to resume the friendliest relations with Germany. It, and additional information available, paint a scene of ghastly horror, through which officers of the R.A.M.C. passed, and in the midst of which they laboured unflinchingly for the benefit of their unhappy comrades.

The fortunes of various of the R.A.M.C. units were curiously mixed up just at this stage in the retreat. Maroilles brought Major F. S. Irvine, D.A.D.M.S. of the Second Division, and two officers and twelve men of No. 6 Field Ambulance together. Captured, they were sent to Landrecies. There they found the bulk of the 4th Field Ambulance and a portion of No. 19 Field Ambulance already prisoners. Maroilles is the next stage in the operations of the British Expeditionary Force, and Landrecies follows it closely.

### Maroilles

Maroilles is just a little place, a diminutive town nestling beside the waters of the River Helpe, itself a tributary of the Sambre. It stands astride the road from Maubeuge to Landrecies, which runs south-west to Le Cateau and is some five miles distant from the former. About it is a pleasant rolling wooded country, and over the way, just across the Sambre, the Forest of Mormal, through which Uhlans and enemy infantry were marching.

A strong company of Germans had endeavoured to cross the Sambre as mentioned before, and had been engaged by the Berkshires. The place was liable to a second attack at any moment, and as retirement was the order of the day, British troops followed No. 6 Field Ambulance and the baggage train into the country south of it.

Sufficient has been said already to explain the confusion that reigned. It was a drenching night and very dark. The geography of the place was a closed book to every officer and man. It was easier to seek for men than to find them. It happened, then, that the last of the troops marched out, and with them those of the natives who feared to remain. They left Major Irvine and the A.D.M.S. alone, with thirty-two wounded Berkshires, of whom twenty-six were gravely hurt. Then the A.D.M.S. seems to have departed. Dawn of the 26th found Major Irvine hard at work, and brought the priest and a young French lady to his assistance. About the same moment shells began to come in and burst among the houses, one of them wounding a boy who was watching Major Irvine at work in a courtyard. Toiling together the three transferred those twenty-six wounded men to the schoolhouse, where beds had been prepared, and there they gave them champagne, beef-tea and other luxuries unearthed from Maroilles Red Cross stores depot.

Still Major Irvine worked on, now in shirt-sleeves, dressing wounds and making the men more comfortable, while shells burst outside.

Then, looking out of the place, he saw enemy cavalry and cyclists passing through. It was 6 A.M. of the 26th, and work in the improvised hospital kept him busy. Hours later there was a clatter in the street, and to his stupefaction French cavalry rode through in a north-easterly direction. Again a pause, and there appeared Colonel Thompson, his A.D.M.S., and later on that party of two officers and twelve men sent back from Prisches on the night of the 25th. The officers were Captain H. E. Priestley and Captain W. Egan.

Hours passed while men and horses rested. Then more sound of troops and the report of rifles. A motor lorry carrying French sappers sped through engaging German cyclists as they went. It was getting dusk now, and as night fell the ambulance section loaded its wounded into the wagons and crept off. A little later they stumbled upon British soldiers—a detachment of the Connaught Rangers—" dead beat and hungry." These Colonel Thompson directed back into Maroilles where food was to be had, and where they were captured.

Colonel Thompson himself then stumbled on through the darkness for he had lost his horse, and finally reached Prisches, narrowly escaping injury as a number of cattle stampeded down the road towards him. Here he managed to get some beer and bread, and a " shake-down " in a house, and altogether spent a most uncomfortable night. At dawn the Curé of the village knocked at the door and presented three men of the Connaught Rangers who had been found sheltering in the Church. Germans were then entering the place, and presently a whole brigade was bivouacked in the streets, eating their breakfasts. There was nothing else to be done but to give themselves up, and this Colonel Thompson did, presenting himself to an artillery officer.

He was quite civil, heard my story, and asked me to have some breakfast. He had a bottle of champagne, and gave me a glass of it. A Staff Officer then wrote me out a pass, which was signed by a General, giving me permission to go back through Belgium to Holland.

But this was far from the intention of the Germans, for he was presently seized by the Provost Marshal, and having been abused by a number of young officers, who called him a spy and worse, and whose interpreter it is rather interesting and significant to note was the son of the then German Consul in Glasgow, he was put under a guard with fixed bayonets, and made to march south in the direction of Etreux.

There is no particular reason to follow Colonel Thompson's movements thereafter, but it may be stated that he assisted No. 47 German Field Lazarette at the Mairie at Etreux. With him was Private Hill, R.A.M.C., who had been attached to the Royal Munster Fusiliers, and who did magnificent service both now and prior to his capture. A Sergeant Rogers of the Royal Munster Fusiliers and some of the stretcher bearers of that battalion were also present and worked splendidly.

The full report which Colonel Thompson has given in the *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps*, February 1915 edition, should be read by those desirous of following his movements further. It makes agreeable reading; he therein states most definitely that the Germans generally were extremely well behaved and treated their prisoners well, that British and German wounded were treated exactly alike, and that due honours were paid to those who unfortunately died of their wounds.

Finally he was sent to Ulm, and from thence to Ingolstadt, where he remained a prisoner for many weary months.

Further reference will be made in a succeeding chapter to those gallant men of the Connaught Rangers whom Colonel Thompson directed to Maroilles. The tale now turns to the ambulance section which left Maroilles in charge of Major Irvine. It pushed on into the darkness, lost its direction, marched here and there, and finally camped when its horses were exhausted. In the misty dawn of the 27th a German cavalry patrol captured the party.

The officer challenged us and asked for an officer. I approached him, when he and his men covered me with revolvers and carbines. I was ordered to "hat off," so I held up my cap, and the officer addressed me in German.

It is pleasant to be able to record that the officer treated Major Irvine in a friendly manner and showed the party every consideration on its way to Landrecies. Outside that town they were stopped by a German battalion and were interrogated by the commanding officer.

I asked that we might be permitted to join our own troops as soon as we had deposited the wounded in the hospital at Landrecies. But the commanding officer merely smiled.

They marched into Landrecies after a while, and discovered a portion of No. 19 Field Ambulance and No. 4 Field Ambulance attending British wounded. The place was full, and for this reason Major Irvine selected the school, where his wounded were made comfortable. The incident which followed is perhaps typical of the German. An officer was good enough to motor Major Irvine round the town and to assist him to obtain food, to which they helped themselves at the various stores. On returning to the school the German officer retained half the spoils meant for our wounded "as some return for his trouble." A woman then produced a supply of milk, and the wounded were fed.

Some while before Major Irvine's detachment reached Landrecies, the 4th Guards Brigade was engaged with enemy advance guards coming through the Forest of Mormal.

### Landrecies

It was evening when the Guards battalions of the 4th Infantry Brigade halted on the road which hugs the eastern fringe of the Forest of Mormal and billeted in the houses of Landrecies. Farther east of them other infantry brigades of the First Corps were pushing south to Dompierre, Maroilles, and elsewhere, while across

the Sambre, perhaps ten miles away, the advance guards and the baggage trains of the weary Third and Fifth Divisions and of the 19th Infantry Brigade were congesting the streets of Le Cateau.

It was raining hard and getting dark when civilians sounded an alarm of approaching Germans. Patrols of the South Irish Horse rode over the bridge into the forest and failed to reappear. A company of the 3rd Coldstreams moved to the cross-roads just west of the railway, taking a machine-gun section with them. It was 7 P.M. A glimpse was caught of patrolling Uhlans, at whom shots were fired. Half an hour later a body of troops emerged from the forest and marched towards the Coldstreams and replied to a challenge in French. A light flashed upon them showed the leading ranks in French uniform. Behind was field grey. The two forces were now but a little distance apart, and a rush brought the Germans to the machine-gun section, one gun of which they captured. The other opened promptly and stemmed the rush. They, the Coldstreams, settled down to business, supported now by another company, and beat off numerous attacks, though a field-gun which the enemy ran up to within easy distance of them gave considerable annoyance. However, early on the 26th of August a howitzer was man-handled into a commanding position, and three shots put the German gun out of action. It was not until about 3 A.M. that the enemy drew off, when the 4th Guards Brigade marched out *en route* for Guise and the south. With them went two officers and seventy-two men of No. 19 Field Ambulance, and all the transport.

Behind, the rearguard left a forlorn yet devoted band of the R.A.M.C., whose numbers were presently to be reinforced by others. That band comprised the remainder of "B" and "C" Sections of No. 19 Field Ambulance, which had marched into Landrecies at 5 P.M. on the 25th, and had been engaged in transferring wounded to the ambulance train which called there. Then the action began and they were engaged with the

wounded, for the bearers went out to the scene of fighting. Casualties amounted to about 150, mainly in the 2nd and 3rd Coldstream Guards and a few in the Grenadier Battalion. The majority were gun-shot wounds, a few only suffering from the effects of shrapnel.

The 4th Field Ambulance came upon the scene when the action was ended. It transferred wounded to No. 1 Ambulance Train at Aulnoye and arrived at a point just east of Landrecies and outside the town a few minutes before the fighting there opened. *En route* Lieutenant P. P. Butler and twenty men of No. 13 Field Ambulance of the Fifth Division had joined the ambulance, having strayed from their own unit.

"Found the 4th Infantry Brigade there (Landrecies)," writes an officer, "a panic in progress and Prussians in the town."

Heavy firing was heard—rifle, machine, and gun fire. The unit parked in an orchard and waited in a deluge of rain. Presently their numbers were added to, for Captain P. Dwyer, R.A.M.C., medical officer of the 1st Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry of the 14th Infantry Brigade, joined them. He too had lost his unit when retreating along those congested roads.

A little later the halted ambulance was overrun by panic-stricken refugees from Landrecies.

"Refugees, men and women and children, stampeded towards us in utter disorder," says an officer; "we rallied our men as best we could. It was stated that Uhlans had entered the village."

At dawn the 4th Infantry Brigade came marching out of Landrecies, upon which "A" Section of No. 4 Field Ambulance squeezed itself into the column. "B" and "C" Sections waited their opportunity. Now came an order to Major Collingwood, commanding the field ambulance, it is stated from the Brigade Major. The whole field ambulance was to return to Landrecies to treat and evacuate the wounded and to bury the dead. On this "A" Section broke away from the column, and, leaving its heavy ambulance wagons to follow,

pressed north towards the town. It passed the Guards' rearguard. It found a barricade of carts and stores and furniture across the road, and forcing an opening reached the hospital.

"Its interior presented a scene that baffles description," an officer tells us, and continues: "It was soon apparent that we should have to decide for ourselves how best to render assistance. We packed three officers and forty-eight other ranks walking cases into the ambulance wagons and started off."

They met the remainder of No. 4 Field Ambulance entering the town, and continuing south at length picked up the Guards' column. A couple of hours later the Germans were in the town, when eight officers of No. 4 Field Ambulance, four of No. 19 Field Ambulance, one of No. 13, and Captain P. Dwyer became prisoners, and with them 219 of the rank and file of the R.A.M.C.

The number of prisoners was presently added to by the arrival of Major F. S. Irvine and Captains H. E. Priestley and W. Egan, while with the field ambulances was the Reverend Mr. Roche, who gave Christian burial to those of the Guards who had fallen in the action. The captured officers were:

*No. 4 Field Ambulance.*
Major P. H. Collingwood.
Captain J. P. Lynch.
Captain A. A. Sutcliffe.
Lieut. S. M. Hattersley.
Lieut. A. J. Brown (S.R.).
Lieut. L. M. Routh.
Lieut. H. W. Hills (S.R.).
Lieut. J. La F. Lauder (C.S.).

*No. 19 Field Ambulance.*
Major W. B. Fry.
Major J. C. Furness (S.R.).
Captain W. K. Beaman (S.R.).
Lieut. A. B. Preston.

*No. 6 Field Ambulance.*
Captain Priestley, H.E.
Captain W. Egan.

Major F. S. Irvine, D.A.D.M S., 2nd Division.
Captain P. Dwyer.
Lieut. P. P. Butler.

Rightly speaking, the capture of these units and of officers of the R.A.M.C. should have been of no great importance to the medical service, for by the usages of war and the articles of the Geneva Convention they

should have been released at the earliest possible moment. But Germany pays no more attention to Conventions than she does to international treaties. If she was capable of tearing into shreds a treaty signed with her own hands and guaranteeing the independence of Belgium, she could and did ruthlessly stamp under foot Conventions and articles drawn up at Geneva. Every member of these captured medical units was in fact sent into Germany, save those who effected their escape, and it will not be without interest to follow briefly their fortunes. First, though, some notes on Landrecies and its condition after the fighting.

The little town was in the utmost disorder,—here houses wrecked, there, pillaged by Germans; streets barricaded, dead lying about, and many at the hospital. As to the inhabitants they had fled for the most part.

Everywhere gave evidence that our troops had vacated Landrecies in great haste,—the various billets full of equipment and rations, also meals partly prepared. German infantry and artillery passed constantly through the town, and at times made insulting remarks and gestures to officers and men of our ambulances.

But the prisoners were not interfered with and continued to care for the wounded, the enemy even handing four Germans into their care. No effort was made to supply rations, so that parties had to forage among the houses. A partially destroyed chemist's shop supplied dressings. As to the losses suffered by the Germans in the fighting at Landrecies, Major Irvine and Captain Dwyer agree that they appeared to be inconsiderable, for only thirty new German graves were found outside the place. But this evidence is not conclusive, and seeing that their attack was not pressed, the probability is that the enemy had considerable numbers put out of action.

In addition to caring for our wounded, one at least of the captured officers was able to act the Good Samaritan elsewhere. Captain Dwyer in his hunt for food came upon first of all a fine charger which had belonged to an officer of the Coldstream Guards and which had been

abandoned in a stable. Imagine his surprise a little later to come upon two officers of the Irish Guards hiding in a little estaminet not yet visited by the thirsty German. Plans for escape were made at once. The two officers were led to the stable, and, mounting the charger, cantered out of the stricken town through a narrow lane and then galloped across country.

On August 29 the captured units marched to Bavai, leaving the worst of their cases in the care of Captains Egan and Priestley. In Bavai our sick and wounded had meanwhile been cared for by the French Red Cross Society; Mlle. de Montford, its presidente, and many other ladies and gentlemen had been indefatigable in their attentions, and Major Irvine, who records their work, speaks most warmly of their devoted service. Here Major Irvine and Captain Dwyer were left at the French Red Cross Hospital, while the remainder went on to Mons. Thence they travelled during three days and four nights by train, "being shown off *en route* to the populace as the first specimens of the British lion." Hostile demonstrations were the order of these unfriendly stops *en route*, and more than once the demeanour of the waiting crowds was more than threatening. Only twice was food given to the travellers, "and when our men asked for coffee or soup of the Red Cross workers, they were spat at and had their mugs knocked out of their hands."

Finally all reached the interior of Germany—except Major Irvine and Captain Dwyer—and were interned in camps in various places. One of these was Wittenberg (Appendix 11), where Major Fry, Captains Priestley, Sutcliffe, Field, Vidal, and Lauder were sent in February 1915. Of these Captains Priestley and Vidal were diverted to hospitals outside the camp, leaving four in Wittenberg itself. Three of these noble souls died in that typhus-infected place, sacrificing themselves in unfaltering efforts to ameliorate the dreadful and wicked conditions of the numerous prisoners there. Lieutenant Lauder alone survived, and returned to England with

Captains Priestley and Vidal, when for the first time the whole horrid, ghastly story was unfolded. These three officers well deserved the D.S.O., C.M.G., and D.S.O. respectively, with which their splendid services were rewarded.

Those others who died will not be forgotten. The writer remembers Major Fry as a young hospital student, tall and spare and filled with tireless energy. Good-natured, smiling, and sympathetic, he spared no effort to alleviate the sufferings of his unfortunate comrades at Wittenberg.

A few sentences must suffice to narrate the doings of Major Irvine and Captain Dwyer, though their adventures would form subject-matter for many chapters. They laid their plans for escape secretly, and on September 10, when the British Expeditionary Force was over the Marne on its triumphal advance to the river Aisne, they slipped out of Bavai, and taking the direction of Valenciennes, finally reached Lille. Here Germans patrolled the town, and the two made off for Dunkirk. Throughout the journey they received assistance from the natives of the country, but only where they had been able to explain that they were English, for the Germans had passed themselves off as of that nationality, thus leading to confusion. One fine fellow, however, a Frenchman who had worked in our Welsh mines, stood by them and assisted them greatly. Both officers were back with the British Expeditionary Force by October.

## CHAPTER VII

Le Cateau—Position of fighting troops—Medical situation—The Battle of Le Cateau—Record of medical units—The Cavalry Field Ambulances—Units of the Fifth Division—Wounded abandoned—Third Divisional Field Ambulances—A scene in Montigny—Arrangements of the Fourth Divisional Medical Staff—Assistance of French villagers.

Le Cateau lies some twelve miles south-east of Cambrai, surrounded at all points of the compass by pleasant villages which dot an undulating open country, forming, as it were, a belt which runs east and west. To the north-east is the wooded country around Mons and the mass of the Forest of Mormal. Due west the land sweeps in great bulges, such a feature of French landscape, dips where the canalised Escaut (Scheldt) crosses it from north to south, and then sweeps on towards Peronne, Bapaume, and Arras.

As weary men of the British Expeditionary Force straggled in the dim light of that August morning, how many gave a thought to the treasured memories of this ancient place, or even recollected that here—possibly through the same cobbled streets that some of the men had traversed—rode Henry VIII. of England. How many, too, of that gallant band composed of men of the Third and Fifth Divisions lived through the months to come to hear the thunder of British guns upon the Somme in 1916, to take a share in the Allied advance in that part, and finally, to sweep on in the triumphant surprise attack of our Third Army in November 1917, when "tanks" and men and guns broke through the vaunted Hindenburg line and gained this Canal de l'Escaut or its immediate neighbourhood, where the

rumble of artillery guns at Le Cateau could be heard on the 26th day of August 1914.

Le Cateau should be a treasured memory for Britain. Though few of the old and honoured Contemptibles, officers or men, survived the perils of the war to return to the neighbourhood in 1918, yet their brothers-in-arms, they and their gallant Allies, French and Americans, fought their way back to and through Le Cateau in 1918, and so took toll for those who fell in 1914. Tramping the fields to west and south of the place to-day, it is hard to believe that here British lads, gaunt and worn, broke the flower of the Kaiser's army on that August morning, hard when traversing the town itself to conjure up those moving scenes of which we are writing.

To refresh the mind of the reader and make the situation clear as it was on the morning of the 26th, so that the medical arrangements for the action now about to commence may be readily followed, the positions taken up by the Second and Third Corps and the Cavalry Division are recapitulated. From east to west they were as follows at about six o'clock in the morning. (See Map III.)

On the extreme right lay the 3rd Cavalry Brigade and portions of other cavalry brigades close to Catillon, which is on the direct road from Le Cateau to La Groise and about halfway between the former and Landrecies, though at a point some four to five miles south of them. Immediately east of Le Cateau were one and a half battalions of the 14th Infantry Brigade (Fifth Division), who were making ready to move off from their bivouac, for they had received no orders to stand and fight. The 19th Infantry Brigade was trailing out of Le Cateau in the direction of Reumont, where subsequently it halted in reserve. On a spur west of Le Cateau and east of the high road which runs south to Bohain, the remainder of the 14th Infantry Brigade made ready for battle; thence continuing west lay the 13th and 15th Infantry Brigades of the Fifth Division, and the 9th, 8th, and 7th Infantry Brigades of the Third Division, precisely

in that order, the left of the 7th Infantry Brigade resting on Caudry, which is a village of some size adjacent to which runs the railway from St. Quentin to Cambrai. The Fourth Division was on the extreme west or left of the two Corps, a gap existing between the right of its 11th Infantry Brigade and the left of the 7th Infantry Brigade at Caudry. The 11th Infantry Brigade stretched from south of Fontaine-au-Pire across the railway which runs to Cambrai. Then there was a second gap, and south of it the 12th Infantry Brigade was at that moment getting into position about Longsart and Esnes. The 10th Infantry Brigade was in reserve at Haucourt, and the 4th Cavalry Brigade watched the extreme left at Selvigny.

The situation of the medical units can be rapidly outlined. It will be remembered that the Cavalry Field Ambulance Column was broken at Montay on the night of the 25th, and that in the darkness and confusion the rear half, consisting of Nos. 1 and 4 Cavalry Field Ambulances, and "B" Section of No. 3, branched off to the left, and missing Le Cateau reached Reumont. Early on the morning of the 26th they had transferred to them some fifty sick of the Fifth Division, and hearing from the A.D.M.S. of that division that there was to be no retirement, they carried these men in the four heavy ambulance wagons which alone accompanied them, and moved to Bertry. Here they were able to put the sick on empty motor lorries and send them away. They took over the Girls' School and another building at the south-east of the town, and prepared for cases. Meanwhile the advance half of the column had halted in Le Cateau, and its escape therefrom and subsequent movements are not by any means lacking in interest.

The 13th Field Ambulance had opened a dressing station at Reumont, where also was No. 14 Field Ambulance, while the 15th was just south of Troisvilles.

The tent division of the 7th Field Ambulance was likewise south of Troisvilles, its bearer division being at Caudry at the far end of the Third Divisional line.

But very early in the morning a portion of the tent division was ordered to Bertry by the D.D.M.S. Second Corps, and at 12.30 P.M. the remainder of the tent division went there also to assist in the hospital. The 8th Field Ambulance had reached the south end of Troisvilles, and moved at an early hour to Montigny, where a dressing station was opened in the church and in two schools. The 9th left Busigny in the early hours and prepared for wounded in Maretz, opening a dressing station in a farm.

There remains only the 19th Field Ambulance to consider. The greater portion of this unit was already captive in Landrecies. "A" Section had been working all night in Le Cateau, and having evacuated its sick and wounded—forty-three in number—to a motor lorry, at 4 A.M. it followed the 19th Infantry Brigade to Reumont, "pursued closely by the enemy." "A" Section now opened a dressing station between Maurois and Reumont.

The Fourth Division had no medical units whatever.

We take the tale back now to the fighting divisions, and show as tersely as possible the main features of this important action along the line Le Cateau—Selvigny, running west, and Le Cateau—Catillon toward the east, where cavalry brigades were holding back an irruption of the enemy between the Second and Third Corps and the First Corps, now retreating south as ordered on the previous evening. To assist in clarifying the situation we extract from Sir John French's despatch of September 7, 1914.

> At daybreak (of the 26th) it became apparent that the enemy was throwing the bulk of his strength against the left of the position occupied by the Second Corps and the Fourth Division.
>
> At this time the guns of four German Army Corps were in position against them, and Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien reported to me that he judged it impossible to continue his retirement at daybreak (as ordered) in face of such an attack.
>
> I sent him orders to use his utmost endeavours to break off the action and retire at the earliest possible moment, as it was impossible for me to send him any support, the First Corps being at the moment incapable of movement.

The French Cavalry Corps, under General Sordet, was coming up on our left rear early in the morning, and I sent an urgent message to him to do his utmost to come up and support the retirement of my left flank; but owing to the fatigue of his horses he found himself unable to intervene in any way.

There had been no time to entrench the position properly, but the troops showed a magnificent front to the terrible fire which confronted them.

The artillery, although outmatched by at least four to one, made a splendid fight, and inflicted heavy losses on their opponents.

At length it became apparent that, if complete annihilation was to be avoided, a retirement must be attempted, and the order was given to commence it about 3.30 P.M. The movement was covered with the most devoted intrepidity and determination by the artillery, which had itself suffered heavily, and the fine work done by the cavalry in the further retreat from the position assisted materially in the final completion of this most difficult and dangerous operation.

Fortunately the enemy had himself suffered too heavily to engage in an energetic pursuit.

All day long the 1st Cavalry Brigade fought in the area south of the line Le Cateau—Catillon, and finally covered the retirement of the Third and Fifth Divisions. The 2nd crossed behind the battle area, and riding west and south reached Roisel, where it watched the extreme left flank. The 3rd helped the 1st Cavalry Brigade to cover the retirement of the Second Corps, while the 4th assisted that of the Fourth Division.

Along the line held by the infantry, action began at about 6 A.M. on the right of Le Cateau. Here the one and a half battalions of the 14th Brigade were heavily attacked, and being forced back, fought their way to the east of Le Cateau.

This right flank was the scene of severe fighting, and after a while the Suffolks, who manned the trenches there, were outflanked and subjected to heavy enfilade and frontal fire. Reserves of the Brigade and two battalions of the 19th Infantry Brigade then pushed up to reinforce the line to which the troops clung tenaciously. Orders for a retirement were then issued, but failed to reach the Suffolks and the King's Own Yorkshire Light

Infantry, who, fighting staunchly, were after a while surrounded. The gallant Suffolks were taken to a man, but part of the K.O.Y.L.I. contrived to escape. In this severe action the 15th Battery R.F.A. gave great assistance, and it, and the magnificent stand of the Suffolks and the K.O.Y.L.I. did not a little to help the withdrawal of our troops from the neighbourhood of Le Cateau.

Passing west the 7th Infantry Brigade at Caudry was attacked at 7 A.M., and this was followed by heavy shelling, high-explosive shells from German howitzers making havoc amongst the stone-built houses and casting splinters in all directions. At a slightly earlier hour, when the streets of Le Cateau were filled with struggling soldiers fighting from house to house, German machine-guns in motor cars and cavalry patrols crept up through the mist and surprised the outposts of the Fourth Division. The division had no divisional cavalry or cyclists with it. As in the case of the field ambulances, they were still *en route*, and as a consequence outposts were shot down, and the Germans getting in close caught the men at work digging trenches. Thereafter the action developed into a ding-dong struggle in which the division did much execution. All day long it retained its position, or one closely behind it, and did not retire till night had fallen and the Third Division had reached Clary.

Meanwhile the Fifth Division had been forced back, and its retirement caused the Third Division to fall back after a fight which had demonstrated the indomitable pluck and persistence of these magnificent battalions. Some did not get back, unfortunately, part of the Gordon Highlanders and the Royal Irish of the 8th Infantry Brigade being cut off and captured by the enemy.

Lastly, it should be stated that the British gunners covered the retirement with magnificent disregard of self, and in spite of great superiority of gun-fire on the part of the Germans. Throughout the day, indeed, our artillery hammered the enemy, and without a doubt

inflicted enormous casualties upon him. This, however, was not so much the case behind Le Cateau where the Fifth Division lay, for there the same open targets were not obtainable. It was in this direction that the grim, dour hanging on of our infantry battalions and their fearful rifle-fire shook the strength and *moral* of the enemy. The threat to the right flank of his force compelled Smith-Dorrien to break off the engagement, so that early in the afternoon a movement south was again in operation. Yet if admittedly the action was broken off on the part of the British Expeditionary Force, that gallant force had without doubt brilliantly achieved its object. It had stopped the German pursuit abruptly, it had inflicted such casualties upon the enemy and had taught him such a lesson that thereafter the pursuit was relaxed and breathing space was won for our weary battalions.

Sir John French's opinion of the action is set forth in the following extract from his first despatch from the seat of war :

> I cannot close the brief account of this glorious stand of the British troops without putting on record my deep appreciation of the valuable services rendered by General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien.
>
> I say without hesitation that the saving of the left wing of the Army under my command on the morning of the 26th August could never have been accomplished unless a commander of rare and unusual coolness, intrepidity, and determination had been present to personally conduct the operation.

Let us see what was the record of the R.A.M.C. on this day of Le Cateau. Reference to the map (III.) shows that field ambulances of the Cavalry Division and of the Third and Fifth Divisions were disposed between Le Cateau and Caudry, grouped in positions adjacent to the divisions of the Second Corps and the 19th Brigade, but farther from the Fourth Division. It was not until the morning had advanced some hours that the cavalry in the neighbourhood of Catillon received any medical assistance, for No. 2 Cavalry Field

Ambulance and two sections of the 3rd had bivouacked in Le Cateau. Their movements make stirring reading.

It was 5.45 A.M. Le Cateau was filled with frantic people. Men of the 14th Brigade posted north-east of the town were awaiting orders to move south. Following a mixed column of Royal Horse Artillery and ammunition wagons the ambulance column got under way, carrying many wounded, and pressed toward the south-east exit. With them was Major E. T. F. Birrell, R.A.M.C., D.A.D.M.S. Cavalry Division. No one had seen the A.D.M.S., who had missed the column during the previous night's confusion. Major T. H. J. C. Goodwin, commanding No. 4 Cavalry Field Ambulance, was in command of this column, and gives us a glimpse of Le Cateau.

> The town square was literally packed with troops, and a block soon occurred. I was standing at the head of the column (No. 2 Cavalry Field Ambulance leading) when an old lady ran up and caught me by the arm, telling me very excitedly that the houses on each side of the street leading out of the market square were full of Germans with "mitrailleuses." I did not pay very much attention to her, but she became very excited, crying and wringing her hands, saying that there was going to be a "massacre."

Pushing on, the column broke free of the press and emerged at full trot from the town. Apparently they were only just out in time, for Major Langford N. Lloyd says :

> It was afterwards reported that once the field ambulance had left the Square, the Germans, who had got into the town at night, opened fire on the troops from the windows of houses round, with very dire results.

At 10 A.M. they were at Bazuel, on the road to Catillon, meeting General Gough of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade. There was heavy rifle-fire to the north-west, closely adjacent to the column, and so imminent did capture seem that Majors Goodwin and Birrell destroyed their papers. Hearing that the cavalry had moved west, the column took the road south to Mazinghien and thence

moved to Wassigny, detaching before they moved from Bazuel a section of light ambulance wagons under Captain T. J. Crean, V.C., to accompany the cavalry in that neighbourhood, and Lieutenant Graham, with a similar section to follow the 3rd Cavalry Brigade. A similar party under Major W. A. Irwin was left with the artillery column at Mazinghien. Picking up wounded throughout the march, the column had some eighty in the ambulance wagons on reaching Wassignies. Here Major Goodwin contrived to stop a train passing down with refugees, and evacuated five officers and seventy other ranks wounded on it, in charge of a R.A.M.C. officer and four men. Much-needed supplies were found in the station yard and appropriated. Then, having collected more wounded, the column marched for Hannappes.

The other half of the Cavalry Field Ambulance Column had gained Bertry in the early morning of the 26th, where the personnel opened two dressing stations. By 3.30 P.M. they had treated about fifty lightly wounded cases, and receiving an order to retire, took the road for St. Quentin. With them had worked the tent division of No. 7 Field Ambulance, and it will be seen that wounded were abandoned, officers and men of the R.A.M.C. being left to care for them.

In the little village of Reumont, nowadays a shattered wreck, the 13th Field Ambulance had all in readiness for the action. The bearers had gone over Reumont ridge with the ambulance wagons soon after dawn, hoping to get in touch with the regimental bearers of the Fifth Division. But enemy observers checked the movement at once, for shell-fire was directed at the column, and it was driven back. It was some hours later before a message arrived directing the ambulance to retire to Maretz, where No. 9 Field Ambulance was already. Here some fifty wounded were treated and evacuated in motor lorries to St. Quentin. Later the ambulance again retired, reaching Estrées a little before midnight.

Immediately south of the ambulance just dealt with was the 14th, close to Honnechy Station, its dressing

station in a field. Here shells were soon dropping, but the work of dressing wounded went on steadily as the bearers returned with them. At 1.30 the shelling was severe, so that the ambulance moved back and then took the road to Maretz, *en route* for Estrées and St. Quentin, carrying its severely wounded with it and picking up many more *en route*. Those who could walk were sent in the care of the Reverend O. S. Watkins to Busigny Station, where a train was waiting.

The 15th Field Ambulance moved early in the morning from Troisvilles to Reumont, and opened one of its tent subdivisions in a farm south-west of the village. It had carried forty wounded on the previous day, and sent these and some sick in its ambulance wagons to Bertry railway station, where a train was reported to be arriving. But no train was then there, and on the orders of a staff officer the wounded were put in a house and left there in charge of a sergeant-major, who was amongst the sick, and the local doctor.

Two sections of bearers went up to the front with Captains J. T. M'Entire and T. Lindsay, while the remainder of the unit retired to Maurois, where a main dressing station was opened in the Infants' School. Here many wounded arrived, the bearers of No. 14 Field Ambulance avoiding their own dressing station as shells were playing about it. Shells were coming in now. The villages all round were being plastered with high explosives and shrapnel, and presently there came a mad rush of horses and ambulance wagons down the road from Reumont, which carried the transport as far as Maretz. This fatal stampede resulted in further wounded being abandoned, for shells were bursting amongst the roofs of Maurois and it was time to be going. Speaking of the situation Major H. W. Slaytor says :

> It made me reluctantly come to the conclusion that I must save my field ambulance. I sent word to the local doctor, and placing the wounded in the care of the local curé and Private Smith, R.A.M.C., of the 14th Field Ambulance, who volunteered

for the duty, I closed my dressing station and moved back on the Maurois—Maretz road.

Later he tried to enter the place again. But the road was crammed with troops, shells were crashing in, and peremptory orders were given him by a staff officer that he must move on. Some of his officers asked to remain with the wounded. The R. R. Mons. Bickerstaffe Drew pleaded also :

but I considered that the interests of the Government would be better served by their presence with their unit, and would not sanction their remaining.

So they marched away, leaving the wounded in good hands. Indeed Major H. W. Slaytor eulogises the work of the parish priest and women of Maurois. As to the ethics of the situation, who can discuss them ? Undoubtedly officers and men would be of greater service to their country if working with the British Expeditionary Force, rather than as prisoners. Trained medical officers were not so numerous that they could be sacrificed or lost with impunity. War is a stern and cruel school. It asks for much and gives little in return. Here it had called for self-sacrificing devotion on the part of British soldiers who were now wounded and helpless. Should others then fall prisoners with them ? A hundred individuals might express as many different opinions. Sentiment would bias the bulk of them without question. But it would not alter the position that officers of the R.A.M.C. are trained to attend to sick and wounded soldiers under the orders of their own service. They are an asset to their country not to be lightly expended, and to allow them to fall into the hands of the enemy—as the case of those taken at Landrecies proves—was indeed throwing their services away recklessly.

Reumont, closely adjacent to Maurois, was also the scene of other work on the part of the R.A.M.C. A section of the 19th Field Ambulance had a dressing station just outside the village, while its bearer sub-

division was in the front line. That fatal stampede of horse transport swept all its ambulance wagons away, though two were recovered some distance beyond Maurois, and were brought back to Reumont.

The village was now under heavy shell-fire, and shells were dropping all round. But Captain C. G. Browne refused to be driven from his dressing station, and encouraged his men to continue collecting wounded. These were taken into the church till seventy or more were there. Meanwhile German guns were busier, and shells crashed into the village of Reumont more frequently. They smashed in the roofs of the houses round the church, and one burst on the roof of the church itself. The place was no longer tenable, and orders were issued for this section of the field ambulance to retire with its wounded. But there were only two ambulance wagons. The task was impossible, however devoted the R.A.M.C. All that could be done was to cram the two ambulance wagons to their utmost capacity and send them off down the road, with wounded men who could walk clinging to them. Then the section marched off, leaving Major J. H. Brunskill, D.A.D.M.S. of the Fifth Division, and Captains W. Crymble and H. B. Kelly of the 14th Field Ambulance, to care for and transfer to German hands the sixty wounded who still lay in the church listening—poor fellows—to the crash of shells about them. Major Brunskill, because of his devotion to duty, was mentioned in one of the first of the Commander-in-Chief's despatches. At 2 A.M. the section with its ambulance wagons—every man drenched to the skin—staggered—rather than marched—into St. Quentin.

The work of the R.A.M.C. behind the Third Division was meanwhile as strenuous as that elsewhere. The tent division of the 7th Field Ambulance was near Montigny in reserve, and was presently ordered to Bertry to assist in opening a dressing station. But within half an hour the place had to be evacuated by the headquarters of the Third Division, and the tent

division marched out at 2 P.M., leaving a number of wounded. It was once more the lack of transport which compelled this decision, though in this case Colonel R. Porter, the D.D.M.S. of the Second Corps, ordered Colonel Kennedy to leave two officers and twenty men of his unit. Ultimately there remained Captain D. M. Corbett, medical officer in charge 2nd South Lancs. Regiment, 7th Infantry Brigade, and Lieutenant E. Davies of No. 7 Field Ambulance, and twenty non-commissioned officers and men from the 4th Cavalry Field Ambulance and No. 7 Field Ambulance, all of whom fell prisoners to the enemy. That night the tent division reached Beaurevoir.

The bearer division assisted the wounded of the 7th Infantry Brigade near Caudry, though no details of its work are given. Late in the day it loaded its ambulance wagons with wounded and marched off towards Bohain.

Montigny, a little village perhaps a mile and a half behind the line of the Fourth Division, was occupied by the 8th Field Ambulance, which had a dressing station in the parish church and two adjacent schools, and also in a Protestant chapel. The village folk willingly supplied mattresses for these places and brought eggs and milk and other food and delicacies. Prior to this, as the unit marched from Troisvilles, some of the bearers and ambulance wagons moved in the direction of Audencourt, the remainder following later. In this way the Third Divisional front was fully supplied with bearers, being divided into three narrow areas, to each of which one bearer subdivision was allocated. In addition the bearer division of No. 7 Field Ambulance was, it will be remembered, at Caudry.

In Montigny itself the tent subdivisions of the unit were now all ready for the reception of wounded, and a number of men were busily engaged in making splints. All the morning wounded arrived, and as many of these needed operation, the equipment was unpacked and cases were put on the operating table. Then quite un-

expectedly the A.D.M.S. ordered an instant retirement, and that one officer and six other ranks should remain with the wounded. Major A. G. Thompson, R.A.M.C., was the officer selected.

"I had completed an amputation of the thigh for a horrible shell wound," writes an officer of the unit, "and was just about to tackle a similar one of the foot, when the A.D.M.S. came into the school at 4 P.M. and said:

"'You must all leave here in five minutes, the Germans are coming in.'

"This was rather a 'facer.' My patient was already under chloroform, and I had already got the knife in my hand. I said to the A.D.M.S.:

"'What about this poor chap on the table?'

"He said:

"'Put him back on his mattress, we can't take him away.'

"The orderlies threw all the equipment, sterilisers, instruments, dressings, etc., into the general stores wagons, as there was no time to pack things. I washed my hands, put on my coat, and was just leaving the school when I met Major Thompson entering it. He said:

"'Good-bye, old chap, I've got to stop here.'

"I forget what I answered; I was totally flabbergasted by the news. I shook hands with him, and I have never seen him since. It turned out that the A.D.M.S. had given Colonel Stone instructions that one officer and six orderlies were to be left in Montigny in charge of the wounded. We could remove only a very few of the latter, as all, or nearly all, our ambulance wagons were out on the field collecting there.

We put a few of the lightly wounded men on top of the baggage in the general service wagons, but the great majority of them (about 120, I fancy) had to be left behind, as I have said before. If we had known that the Staff contemplated a retirement that day, we could have sent some of the wounded to the railway station at Bertry, but we were all given to understand until 4 P.M. that there was no chance of a retreat. Had we been equipped with motor ambulances instead of horsed ambulances we could, of course, have saved practically the whole of our patients. We left Montigny within the five minutes allotted by the A.D.M.S."

Rain was coming down in torrents as the field ambulance took the road south for Clary and clambered the hill to that village. On arrival there all turned to

take a last look at Montigny. It was in flames ! Enemy shells were smashing the roofs and plastering the cobbled street of the little place with shrapnel.

In the centre of the area of operations, but farther south, the third medical unit of the Third Division lay in reserve at Maretz, where it admitted to its dressing station a number of wounded who were transferred from other field ambulances by means of motor lorries. Suddenly it was ordered to retire, and moved out of the village. Later it ventured back and continued to assist the wounded. A short while afterwards it again received orders to retire, and finally reached Estrées, picking up other wounded *en route*. These, with the wounded it had brought from Maretz, were sent to the railway station.

The description of the medical arrangements at Le Cateau now takes us to the far left flank, where the Fourth Division lay entrenched facing north-west. Major H. Ensor, the D.A.D.M.S. of this division, has left a faithful record of the day's doings, from which it would appear that though the regimental medical officers and medical staff of the division were fatally handicapped by the entire absence of field ambulances, they yet contrived to do remarkable things without them.

About 6 A.M. fourteen wounded were brought in from Haucourt, which had been attacked. These were dressed in a farmhouse, where was the Divisional Headquarters. Presently a retirement was ordered, when all who could be moved were put in general service wagons, the others being left at the farm.

Meanwhile Colonel C. E. Faunce, A.D.M.S. of the division, rode to Selvigny and there contrived to collect fourteen farm-carts. As wounded accumulated these carts were loaded up and sent off to the west, providentially escaping enemy cavalry and reaching Peronne, where the wounded were put on the railway.

Major Ensor had now opened a dressing station nearly a mile south of Haucourt, and here collected the R.A.M.C. clerical staff of the division. Fighting

was now in full swing, and a considerable number of wounded arrived, and having been dressed were sent off at once, if fit to move, every variety of vehicle being made use of.

It was still only a little after seven in the morning when superior enemy forces flung the left of the division back on Selvigny and brought their guns to bear on the area in which was the dressing station. This was at once moved to the road fork just north of Selvigny, where the work of dressing and evacuating wounded continued. Less than an hour later a further move became necessary, and the dressing station was opened in the street of Selvigny, where the walls and houses protected it from rifle fire. Here it remained for hours, busily at work, still steadily sending wounded to the rear, and placing the serious cases in two of the houses. Motor cars and other vehicles moving back towards Malincourt were impressed, and all walking cases were sent off along the road in the same direction. Thus, without field ambulances or ambulance transport, the medical staff of the division, though hopelessly undermanned, was clearing its wounded to the rear as successfully as, if not more so than, in the case of other divisions. But the number of serious cases was constantly increasing, and the force might withdraw at any moment. In this predicament Major Ensor held up the Cavalry Divisional Supply Column as it came clattering through Selvigny, and contrived to send off more than forty of his cases, despatching one of his slender staff of R.A.M.C. orderlies with them.

Here and there it has been possible to give a picture of other villages in the neighbourhood of Le Cateau, and, thanks to the notes available, one is able to portray Selvigny as it was on this drenching August morning. It is a tiny, straggling place, clinging to the single high street, as is so often the case in France, yet forming, as it were, a triangle, for three roads circumvent it, forming a cross to the north and west and east of the village. A little west and north rifles and machine-guns were

rattling, while in the far distance were German guns, the shells bursting near the village, rifle bullets sweeping the streets and mushrooming against the stone-built houses. In the latter cowered the unfortunate natives, not knowing what to do, too frightened to flee, too dazed to properly understand the situation. But they could understand the work of the British dressing station posted in their main street, and watched the D.A.D.M.S. and his R.A.M.C. clerical staff as they dressed and tended their cases. When the supply of dressings gave out they came forward with odd strips of linen, encouraged to do so by their priest, and eagerly supplied all that was asked of them. Our ambulance units had found the same elsewhere. Nearly always it was the parish priest, the father of the village, who came to the assistance of the British Medical Service, and everywhere the women and children backed his efforts. Mention of this particular priest leads one to wonder whether it was he who in October 1918 still remained in the village and—good man and true that he must have been—waited till the invader had retired, and promptly cut wires attached to bombs deposited in his beloved Church, which were destined to explode as the British once more—after years of absence—entered. This was the gallant work of a priest of Selvigny—maybe, undoubtedly it would seem, that of the self-same individual.

It was close upon noon. The medical supplies of the Fourth Divisional Headquarters having been expended, the stocks of lint provided by the folks of Selvigny were supplemented from the regimental equipment of the 2nd Seaforth Highlanders. At this stage there was a lull in the action, and the regimental medical officers at once went out in front of the battalions, taking bearers with them to search for wounded, many of whom were thus rescued.

An hour later the troops were again in action, and shells were coming over. It was not, however, for this cause that the dressing station was now moved to the north end of the village, but so as to get closer to the

wounded. These soon filled it, for it was in a school. Resource and energy seem to have been displayed by the medical staff of the Fourth Division, for not only was this dressing station cleared by sending all walking wounded down through the village, but an ambitious attempt was made to support the regimental bearers. A cart was begged or borrowed from a villager and sent off toward the front, returning often with severely wounded.

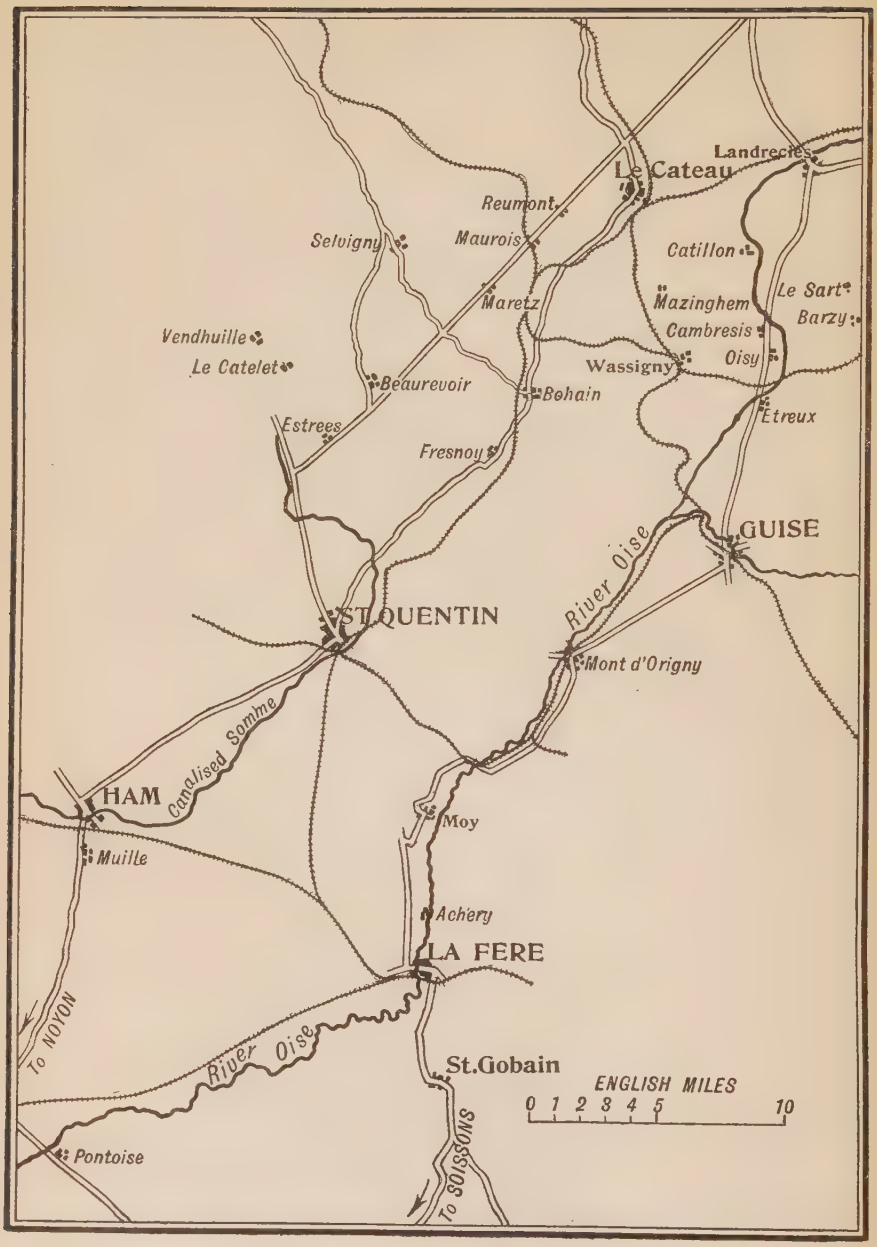
The crisis of the day was at hand. Those shells which had been splashing the country-side to the north and west of the village began to crash amongst the houses of Selvigny. Still the D.A.D.M.S. worked on doggedly, loyally supported by his slender staff. Two hours passed. Roads which before had been comparatively clear of troops were packed with marching battalions. The division was retiring. It was time to leave. An officer and six men, who alone were fit to move, were loaded on the cart above mentioned, and the medical staff, which had done such strenuous work, moved off to Vendhuille, leaving, as they were bound to do, some of their helpless cases in the village.

Undoubtedly the record of work performed by this wholly inadequate force of the R.A.M.C. attached to the Fourth Division is in the highest degree meritorious. It is useless to discuss the question of the missing field ambulances, and indeed, in a previous note, abundant reasons have been advanced for their non-arrival. They were at or near St. Quentin, out of sound of the guns of Le Cateau, officers and men eating their hearts out for disappointment. But the A.D.M.S. and the D.A.D.M.S. and the regimental medical officers and R.A.M.C. clerical staff made a wonderful effort in their absence. Comparisons are notoriously unsatisfactory. Figures of casualties are not available. But it would seem that alone and unaided but for village help, Major Ensor greatly enhanced the reputation of his corps at Le Cateau. For this and other services he was mentioned in Sir J. French's despatches.

The effect of this absence of field ambulances from a strictly military point of view is set forth in the report of the Fourth Divisional Staff as follows :

> The absence of all field ambulances from the beginning of the operations on the 25th until the 29th was perhaps a greater handicap than would appear at first sight, and was responsible for a great deal of the straggling that took place during the 27th and following days. Many of the wounded and sick would in the ordinary course have been treated and evacuated on the field, but as it was, many of the slightly wounded and sick accompanied the division on its march, and were carried on artillery wagons and impressed carts. This had very bad results in two ways. Firstly, it affected for the time being the march discipline of the units, and, secondly, it was responsible for the tiring out of the artillery horses, many of the guns and wagons carrying for several days up to eight sick and wounded. It was also difficult under the circumstances to weed out those who were really sick from those who were merely stragglers.

Events have brought the tale to the night of the 26th. The movements of some of the lines of communication units are now dealt with, and later the story follows the R.A.M.C. in their long and almost unending march south across the valley of the Oise, where for the first time for many a weary day the field ambulances, and those of their horses which still survived, were able to snatch a few hours' rest. It is a tale of retreat, of hardships endured, of duty done that makes the pulse throb.




LE CATEAU TO ST. GOBAIN.

## CHAPTER VIII

The clearing hospitals and their movements—Motor lorries for sick and wounded —The clearing of St. Quentin—Ambulance trains—Main features of the retreat during August 26, 27, and 28—Medical units of the First Corps—Immobility of Cavalry Field Ambulances—Medical units of the Second and Third Corps—No. 7 Field Ambulance—Losses of the R.A.M.C.

THE township of Guise, the valley of the Oise, La Fère, St. Quentin and Ham and Noyon come into the picture as the weary divisions of the British Expeditionary Force staggered southwards on their way from the Dompierre, Landrecies, Le Cateau line to Paris. Chief interest, however, is focussed upon St. Quentin, the ancient city on the confines of which the Duke of Savoy, Philip of Spain, and an English force gave battle to French troops as long ago as 1557. The monastery and palace which the Spanish king erected as a thank-offering for his victory can still be seen—though German vandals have wrought much damage to them as to the whole of this once fair city. The walls of the old town have, in fact, witnessed many bloody encounters, not the least of which was that of Faidherbe's army of the north against the Prussians in 1871. (See Map IV.)

Here again was the Prussian hammering at the gate, and holding it were Britons.

Four days had passed since the clearing hospitals and Nos. 5 and 7 Stationary Hospitals had reached St. Quentin, which was the nodal point on the railway through which sick and wounded might be expected to pass. On the 24th, in fact, a few dribbled through, though there was as yet no sign of the rush which was soon to follow. Then an order emanated from General

Headquarters, and packing only their light equipment, and leaving their horses and vehicles and tents, four of the clearing hospitals took train to Aulnoye. They were going into action, so they hoped. The sound of guns came to their ears for the first time, and as the morning of the 25th dawned they busied themselves with loading wounded as they came in from Bavai and elsewhere on to the two ambulance trains which have been mentioned.

Then the sound of guns grew nearer, the rearguard of the First Corps came in sight, and the train which had borne them to Aulnoye hurried off, leaving the station approaches jammed with frantic refugees clamouring to be taken. That night they were back in St. Quentin, the personnel having thus far done little more than lift wounded men into the *fourgons de marchandise* which comprised the ambulance trains. At St. Quentin these four clearing hospitals stood fast during the 26th, and on the 27th went on by train to Rouen.

The following measures had been taken by Colonel O'Donnell, who accompanied the General Staff of the British Expeditionary Force, to care for the wounded who might be—and who actually were—transferred by field ambulances to the empty motor lorries of the supply columns. Each one of the clearing hospitals had on the 24th detailed a small party, including a medical officer, to accompany the columns from railhead to refilling point, thus ensuring some attention for the wounded *en route*. These parties set off at once, and doubtless proved useful, though there is no mention of their movements.

Meanwhile Nos. 5 and 7 Stationary Hospitals at St. Quentin evacuated their patients to the railway and made ready to move, while Nos. 3 and 6 Clearing Hospitals took their places, though the rest-station party of No. 5 Stationary Hospital continued to work at the station. No. 7 then undertook a useless journey to Aulnoye, and finding the station about to be abandoned returned to St. Quentin and went on to Amiens, where No. 5 followed on the 26th.

To the two clearing hospitals which remained open and ready and to Major A. L. Webb and his men of the Sanitary Service, who assisted generally, fell the onerous task of clearing St. Quentin. There were some 600 sick and wounded in the town as the evening of the 26th approached, and numbers had already been evacuated to the station and put on an ambulance train. The morning of the 27th saw the officers and men working at high speed. Every class of vehicle was requisitioned, even the tram-cars were pressed into use, and finally some 34 officers and 400 men were got away safely, and eventually reached Rouen. Those four short days had witnessed the passage through the town of approximately 1500 cases. Some of these had travelled on ambulance trains, others were crowded into goods trucks. Every case capable of being moved was brought away by the strenuous efforts of the personnel of those units. At night, on the 27th, or by early morning of the 28th, all six clearing hospitals were at Rouen, for the most part labouring to unload wounded and convey them to the base hospitals, which meanwhile had been preparing there for them.

Ambulance trains assisted but little in the evacuation of St. Quentin. No. 1 was back there from Amiens in the early morning of the 27th, and left for Rouen with 16 officers and 260 men. No. 2 did not return after discharging its large convoy of 30 officers and 440 men at Rouen till the 28th, when it gained Noyon. The fortunes of the remaining four ambulance trains require a little more attention. It may be admitted that those R.A.M.C. units were not too impressed with the rough-and-ready vehicles allotted to them. But that was the least of their misfortunes. At a moment when provision of adequately fitted railway transport for wounded was urgent, failure to obtain ordnance stores crippled these four remaining units.

Amiens was swarming with French Army agents buying every variety of article for a similar purpose, so that recourse had to be had to Paris. Thither the

officer commanding No. 3 Ambulance Train, Major B. Burke, proceeded on the 24th, and securing what was required, loaded his purchases on trucks and returned to Amiens. The place was already evacuated, for this was the 27th August. Guns were already within hearing, and the Royal Flying Corps park train was just running out of the station. There was only time to hook on the trucks of purchased equipment and get off to Rouen.

Meanwhile the nine wagons, of which No. 3 Ambulance Train as yet alone consisted, were made up to the number of forty, and left Amiens on the afternoon of the 25th for St. Quentin, under the orders of Major A. H. Waring, and on the 26th ran on to Busigny, where it was behind the Second Corps at Le Cateau. But it was at once ordered back to Fresnoy, where it arrived with a few wounded. In the afternoon it was back at St. Quentin and reached Amiens with some seventy-four patients. On the 27th it arrived at Rouen with one officer and 186 men. Nos. 4 and 5 Ambulance Trains meanwhile were conjoined and ran to Rouen, for they were not as yet fitted.

The history of the movement backward of the units of the British Expeditionary Force during the 26th, 27th, and 28th of August would fill a volume; and doubtless those weary exhausting hours spent tramping over the terribly hard pavé roads, which are a feature of north-east France, were as a lifetime to many of our brave fellows. To the field ambulances the long, forced march to the River Oise was a perfect nightmare, and rest, when opportunity came at length to snatch a few meagre hours, found men and horses for the most part almost dropping.

The actions at Maroilles, Landrecies, and Le Cateau being now ended, the narrative is continued to show the three British Corps in full retreat. But it were well to give one reminder. The battle of Le Cateau was fought on the Wednesday of this most eventful week. Maroilles, however, was the scene of fighting on the

part of the Berkshires on the previous evening; and the Guards had done with the enemy coming through the Forest of Mormal and advancing on Landrecies before the streets of Le Cateau resounded to the machine-guns and rifles of the Germans as they pressed the 14th Infantry Brigade south and east of it. In point of fact the 19th Infantry Brigade was already marching south before action was joined anywhere in the neighbourhood of Le Cateau, while the remaining units of the First Corps farther east, following orders already issued, were continuing the retreat towards Guise and the Oise valley.

Hard marching was the main feature of the 26th as regards the First Corps. As field ambulances of the Second and Third Corps settled down to deal with casualties of Le Cateau, the tent divisions of similar units of the First Corps were packed in double-banked columns of vehicles on the roads leading to Guise *via* Etreux. The bearer divisions, however, marched with the brigades, each accompanied by ambulance wagons. It was a case of the survival of the fittest. Ambulance wagons were disposed amongst the marching columns and creaked under the loads of exhausted men who filled them. It was sultry and muggy. Weight of accoutrements and great-coats told on the men, and presently the coats were abandoned, while packs were loaded into wagons. Blistered feet again disabled numbers as they tramped the hard pavé roads, and these cases kept the personnel of the field ambulances continuously busy.

The one other feature of this exhausting day was the ambushing of the 2nd Connaught Rangers. It has been mentioned that Colonel Thompson, A.D.M.S., Second Division, and Major Irvine, his deputy, issuing from Maroilles on the night of the 26th, stumbled upon a considerable detachment of the regiment lying exhausted just south of that village. They had formed part of the 5th Infantry Brigade which acted as rear-guard to the Second Division, and getting into diffi-

culties on high and enclosed ground near Marbaix, were finally ambushed in or near Le Grand Fayt. The latter is a little village just south of Maroilles. Between the two places the R.A.M.C. convoy had wandered in the darkness, and there, too, the companies of this battalion had become divided. Some were killed near Le Grand Fayt, others surrendered. The remainder of the detachment was captured in Maroilles with Colonel Thompson. In all, 6 officers and 280 other ranks, including the commanding officer, were lost in this rearguard action.

As to the wounded, there is little doubt that some of them were succoured by the bearer division of No. 3 Field Ambulance. Favril lies but a little way from Le Grand Fayt, a mere hamlet, and here one officer and thirty men wounded were collected by the bearers and were brought to Etreux station. Here some of the field ambulances of the First Corps converged at night time and finding a train evacuated their ambulance wagons.

How strenuous the day proved can be gathered from the notes of various diarists. For instance, the bearer division of the 1st Field Ambulance reached Oisy, just north of Etreux, as evening was falling, when it was supposed, though wrongly, that the enemy were pressing closely.

"Germans reported around us and in possession of the road ahead," the officer commanding writes. "Halt called and all fighting troops ordered to the front. Field ambulance at the moment in direct line of fire behind a bridge."

Finally the unit reached Cambresis and billeted in a filthy barn.

Had been on the road sixteen hours. Every one so tired and evening so wet we all got into our valises as soon as possible, without food.

The 2nd Field Ambulance passed an uneventful day save for the fatigue of the march and constant work among stragglers. The 3rd Field Ambulance we have

referred to. Its bearer division did not reach Etreux till very early in the morning of the 27th. It, and the 1st and 2nd Field Ambulances had numerous sick and wounded. These were now put in charge of No. 3 Field Ambulance, thus freeing Nos. 1 and 2. A train of trucks was secured, thanks largely to the energy and initiative of Sergeant J. Cooke, R.A.M.C., and each truck floored with straw. A total of 150 cases was entrained, including thirty stretcher cases, for which there were six sets of brechot apparatus. A medical officer was now selected to accompany the train, and the R.A.M.C. sergeant above mentioned. Then trouble arose over the engine-driver.

"Learnt at station that trouble had occurred with the driver of the train," says Lieut.-Colonel G. Cree; "one had bolted. Another was procured, and a guard put over him on the engine."

As a matter of fact it was the energetic Sergeant Cooke who again helped to save the situation. Apparently the engine-driver had not only decamped, but had gone off with his engine. Thereupon Sergeant Cooke, with the initiative of a South African campaigner, commandeered the only remaining engine and its driver, while Colonel Cree made the position sure by posting a guard on the locomotive.

Other cases filtered into the station and were entrained. Finally the enemy were drawing so close that the train had to be despatched. It was fired on at Wassigny, but eventually reached Havre. For the great assistance he gave in loading and caring for these sick and wounded, and for the initiative he displayed, Sergeant J. Cooke of the R.A.M.C. was later awarded the D.C.M.

The remnants of No. 4 Field Ambulance were last mentioned as they emerged from Landrecies with a load of wounded. The section pushed south all day and reached Guise at nightfall. Here the French railway authorities were asked for a train, the wounded meanwhile being laid on straw on the platform. In the very early hours of the 27th these men who might

have fallen into German hands were sent away towards Paris.

The two remaining field ambulances of the Second Division provide no feature of interest; the 5th reached Barzy, where there was terrible confusion, French troops congesting the streets, and the 6th, bivouacking at Le Sart, about half a mile north of it.

There was no rest for the weary First Corps on the 27th August. The fighting units and their medical units came tramping down the Route Nationale within easy distance of the River Oise, sweltering in the heat of the sun, packed tightly together, covered with dust and parched with thirst. As on the previous day, tent divisions marched and bivouacked with the train, the bearer divisions accompanying the brigades. And once more the R.A.M.C. had more than mere marching to perform. There were stragglers to pick up, the exhausted to revive, and numerous men with blistered feet who needed attention. With all that there was continuous anxiety about the horses, which, poor beasts, like those who controlled them, rolled for want of sleep and rest, trod the iron-hard pavé roads with hoofs often shoeless, and panted and sweated as they hauled heavy ambulance wagons, which were persistently overloaded.

It was a critical day for the Corps. Throughout the hours as they sweltered down the Oise valley the retreating troops heard the distant crackle of musketry. The rearguard was frequently engaged, and north of Guise a portion of it met with disaster, for after a very gallant fight against overwhelming odds, the Munster Fusiliers were cut off with a section of the 118th Battery and forced to surrender.

"Heavy firing all day and the enemy obviously all round us. Staff apparently much worried," writes Major H. A. Hinge, No. 1 Field Ambulance.

Anticipating casualties he opened a tent subdivision of his field ambulance in a field. But it would seem that this was a false alarm, for some time later the bearer

division marched up with the 6th Brigade, bringing three officers and twenty men wounded. A few more were now admitted, and after a short rest the field ambulance was on the road again, marching in pitch-black darkness. Like others of the First Corps medical units, it had been on the move for nearly thirty hours, pressing south-west all that while by forced march, scarcely ever halting, and even then forced to make additional journeys. At Etreux the ambulance wagons had to go to the railway station. It was the same at Mont d'Origny and Guise, and meanwhile, the remainder of each unit was busy in its hastily improvised dressing station. Then a hurried meal, horses watered and fed, and on again into the night, still moving south-west, still keeping a careful look-out for exhausted men and stragglers, still marching, marching interminably.

Incidents, so far as they concerned this Corps and its field ambulances during the third of these very strenuous days, can be portrayed in a few sentences. The 28th August saw the Corps for the most part south of the River Oise and the Serre, which joins it in the neighbourhood of La Fère, and plunging into the northern boundary of the Forest of St. Gobain. It was a grilling hot day, and the heat and general exhaustion of the march went far to render the field ambulances immobile.

"Only one halt, at Achery, in twelve-hours' march," reports Major H. A. Hinge of No. 1 Field Ambulance. "Animals very exhausted—three abandoned *en route*—had carried sick and wounded all day in the ambulance wagons, thirty in number." And on the next day he writes: "Rest day, which troops, horses, etc., urgently required. In fact, had it been necessary to march to-day I should have had to abandon wagons owing to the utter exhaustion of the animals."

So it was with other medical units.

"Too fatigued to move on," says one. "Personnel and horses in a state of exhaustion," writes another. "Only three halts *en route* (since A.M. 26th), great trouble with men's feet. Horses in a bad state."

In the neighbourhood of Pontoise the men of the field ambulance enjoyed for the first time for four days the luxury of a few hours' continuous sleep—their most urgent requirement—and also a hot meal, to which they had been long strangers. Almost at once their spirits revived. As in the case of the jaded men with the Third and Fifth Divisions and the Third Corps, difficulties and dangers were soon forgotten, the incorrigible and unconquerable joviality of the British soldier reasserted itself, and soon they were whistling and singing.

A few more words complete the tale of the First Corps units for the three days in question. There was a brilliant cavalry action on the Route Nationale near Moy, where, sighting a strong force of enemy cavalry, the 5th Cavalry Brigade sent the 12th Lancers and the 2nd Dragoons at them, while "J" Battery opened on a formed body farther away. Getting home, the Lancers and Dragoons did much damage, some 20 officers and 100 men of the enemy being killed, and 200 and more wounded—this at a cost of 2 officers and 4 men killed, and 1 officer and 5 men wounded.

Fortunately the light ambulance wagons of the 5th Cavalry Field Ambulance were in close touch. It was a rare occasion, one imagines, for the reports of cavalry field ambulance commanders refer constantly to the want of mobility of their units.

> Having now commanded a cavalry field ambulance for ten days actually in the field, I am absolutely convinced that the organisation, equipment, transport, in fact everything as at present laid down as being of, or belonging to, a cavalry field ambulance, is absolutely wrong. Too cumbersome and heavy and too slow moving.

The gist of this criticism is contained in the last sentence. The equipment and organisation, generally speaking, were not at fault, and are precisely now as then. The motor ambulance has done everything to transform these valuable units into extremely mobile bodies, and the commencement of open warfare on the Western Front during the latter weeks of the war proved

beyond doubt that these motor vehicles had indeed done all that was anticipated of them.

But to return to the cavalry action near Moy on the banks of the river Oise. The light ambulance wagons of No. 5 Cavalry Field Ambulance were happily on the scene, and with an escort of Lancers to protect them, and under fire of German carbines, the personnel picked up both British and German wounded. The latter were carried to Moy and other villages nestling on the banks of the Oise, and left there in the care of French peasants. Then the detachment, which included two chaplains, rode on after the cavalry column, leaving the sixth of its light ambulance wagons to bring in a wounded British officer. Lieutenant E. J. Wyler was with this ambulance wagon, and presently he and his patient were captured, though it is pleasant to be able to record the fact that the Germans treated them well and released them two or three days later.

Only one other item remains to be mentioned, not because it has any important bearing upon the narrative, but because it traces the movements of a column which has received previous mention. That column of four cavalry field ambulances which stumbled towards Le Cateau on the night of the 25th was broken into two portions, one of which took part in the battle of Le Cateau. The other marched south-east, then south, and finally left the Second Corps area. Marching this way and that, warned that the enemy were all about them, it eventually reached Mont d'Origny, and joined the First Corps column.

The First Corps having reached the neighbourhood of the Forest of St. Gobain, with the rivers Serre and Oise between it and the pursuing Germans, it is now time to trace the retreat of the Second and Third Corps from Le Cateau. One can sum up the three days—the 27th, the 28th, and the 29th—by saying that the divisions fought no actions of importance, and met with no difficulties that could be described as greater than those which faced their comrades farther to the east. This

the two corps owed entirely to their magnificent achievement at Le Cateau. The undoubtedly heavy blow inflicted there upon the enemy had stayed his pursuit, and so gave respite to the weary divisions. But it should be clearly borne in mind that it was not alone divisions of the Second and Third Corps which felt the benefit of this slackened pursuit on the part of the enemy. Le Cateau secured immunity from attack for the First Corps no less, so that it too withdrew from the neighbourhood of Landrecies and Maroilles without serious interruption. Nevertheless those forced marches which followed were terrible—" terrific " one officer of a field ambulance describes them.

" It looked like the break-up of an army," reports an officer of a combatant unit, and then another: " It was wonderful the way the men pulled themselves together and marched cheerfully on."

This, by the way, is a note when the division had covered thirty-eight long miles from Le Cateau, with one short halt at Estrées.

There are notes in profusion to tell of the exhaustion of the men, of how accoutrements were jettisoned, and how in many cases ammunition was thrown aside and men placed in the wagons. It should be borne in mind, however, that the diaries of medical units are written by officers who, as a matter of duty, see the footsore, the sick, and the weary. These, however, formed but a small percentage of the divisions. The bulk of the men " stuck it out " gamely, and though ready to drop with fatigue, were just as ready to fight, and would perhaps have preferred that to further marching. In every possible way those who were exhausted were assisted ; and all the while, with scarcely a halt, fighting troops and medical units pressed southwards, mixed inextricably together, portions of the Third and Fifth Divisions marching side by side in the same column. This is a picture of the roads just north of St. Quentin given us by an officer marching with one of the field ambulances :

What other villages we traversed I do not know, but it was on this march that we came upon an extraordinary collection of jettisoned stores by the roadside. For at least a mile, probably more than that, there were every ten yards piles of British shells, ammunition, horse-shoes, saddlery, and many other articles of equipment.

The units of the 19th Infantry Brigade, and mixed units of the Fourth, Third, and Fifth Divisions poured into St. Quentin at varying hours of the 27th, riding on gun limbers, in general store wagons, in the ambulance wagons of the medical units, or clinging to the sides of them. One of the field ambulances was blocked on the road just outside the town, and a car following it was held up by the traffic. A medical officer notes :

The man inside put his head out of the window and got into conversation with me. He had a staff cap on, but was wearing a " British warm " with no badges of rank, and I had no idea who he was. I found out afterwards that he was Brigadier-General Wing, who was commanding the artillery of the Third Division ; . . . then he asked me a few questions about our experiences, and ended by asking me what I thought of the show. I said, " I hope to God I shall never see the British Army run away as fast as this again." He laughed, and said, " I hope so too."

Considering that he had just lost twenty guns at the battle of Le Cateau—of which I was unaware at the time—he was remarkably cheerful, and I may add that he was exceedingly popular throughout the division.

This statement as to the loss of twenty guns is, however, inaccurate. General Wing had lost seven guns only, and had, in point of strict fact, deliberately sacrificed four of them to cover the retirement of the 9th Brigade. He, with the rest of the artillery of the Second and Third Corps, had good reason for feeling cheery about Le Cateau, for they had put up a splendid fight, and had evidence to prove that they had severely shaken the German. His slack pursuit was significant of his losses.

Then the same officer goes on to describe St. Quentin :

A number of staff officers were controlling the traffic like the policemen at Piccadilly Circus. There were several roads leading into the town, and each road was one mass of transport

of all descriptions. The Staff were sorting out the different divisions, and directing them by which road they were to leave St. Quentin.

Perhaps another incident which occurred during these three days is worth relating. It was on the last day of these forced marches, when the long column now approaching Ham and the canalised river Somme passed the figure of a short staff officer standing beside the road, watching them critically. It was the Commander-in-Chief, Field-Marshal Sir John French, and one can imagine how he instantly electrified the men, and how their spirits, already wonderfully revived and their march discipline re-established, improved on the instant as he told them that they had done much to be proud of, for the battle of Le Cateau had been the means of saving the left flank of the French Army, and with it of the whole Allied position. Heads were held higher after that, men marched on steadily, yet with greater determination. So they came at length to their bivouacs, where for the first time for many days they were to enjoy rest and sleep.

The march provides items of peculiar interest when one analyses the movements of the various field ambulances. No. 7 Field Ambulance, for instance, now split into two portions, the bearer and the tent division, and marching apart from one another met with a strange happening. The tent division reached Fresnoy railway station at 5 A.M. on the 27th, with its horses completely exhausted so that the vehicles had to be pushed by the men to get them along. Here the Commanding Officer and others went off to interview the mayor, having sent a message through to St. Quentin to ask for instructions, and giving information that his ambulance was stranded because of the condition of its horses. In his absence a sudden order arrived for the tent division to entrain, and coming back to the station the Commanding Officer found the personnel gone, and with them the sick and wounded carried in the ambulance wagons, the station abandoned entirely, and only the wagons left with their

loads in disorder and every sign of a hasty departure. It was a predicament. The Commanding Officer, with two other officers of the unit and a Roman Catholic chaplain and one A.S.C. driver, took to the railway, marching along the line, and presently sighted a locomotive coming towards them hauling a truck in which were French soldiers. This picked them up and took them to St. Quentin. The carts and wagons themselves, seven in number, were discovered some while later by some stragglers of the K.O.S.B.'s. Sergeant R. J. Gomme of the K.O.S.B.'s with this party at once put the men into the wagons and brought them on to Pontoise, where he handed the wagons over to No. 15 Field Ambulance. It may be added that no blame is attached to any officers of the field ambulance in question. It is quite clear that once the detachment at the station had entrained, obeying the order from St. Quentin, the French railway authorities insisted on despatching the train, and themselves mounting upon it, abandoned Fresnoy, and with it the Commanding Officer and others of the field ambulance.

The bearer division meanwhile gained St. Quentin and evacuated a number of cases to an ambulance train, finally reaching Muille, south of Ham. The tent division, however, remained on the train till it reached Compiègne, where it opened a dressing station for the care of sick and wounded passing through on the railway.

The 8th Field Ambulance reached Genvry on the 28th without particular incident, while the 9th Field Ambulance arrived at Varesnes, near Pontoise. Here, too, was No. 13 Field Ambulance, while just south, at Carlepont, No. 14 bivouacked. Two officers and thirty-seven men of its personnel were now missing, and were later reported prisoners of war; the officers were Captains H. B. Kelly and W. Crymble, who have been referred to previously at Reumont. The 15th Field Ambulance did great work after Le Cateau. It brought from that field some 120 wounded, and evacuated them at St. Quentin; finally it reached Pontoise towards evening

of the 28th, with its men and horses incapable of further movement.

The retreat so far had thinned the ranks of the field ambulances considerably. Portions of Nos. 4, 6, 8, 14, and 19 Field Ambulances were prisoners. They, and regimental medical officers presently reported missing, make up a list which shows how the R.A.M.C. suffered.

# CHAPTER IX

Base medical units—Preparing a General Hospital—The Palais des Regattes and Gare Maritime d'Escale, Havre—Evacuation of bases—Upheaval and disorganisation of base medical units—St. Nazaire—Nantes—Le Mans—Amiens—The retreat continued—Exhaustion of the horses—Soissons—Crossing of the River Aisne.

Saturday, August 29, was a rest day so called for the British Expeditionary Force, though few units enjoyed twelve hours' continuous quiet. Almost a week had passed since the campaign actually opened, though to the unshaven, worn-out personnel of the field ambulances it felt like an eternity. Nor was effort to be relaxed for long. There were still miles of difficult country between Ham and Pontoise and Gobain to south-east Paris, which now, without doubt, was the enemy's objective.

The moment is perhaps opportune, while troops are resting, to bring to notice those base medical units which had crossed to France with the British Expeditionary Force, and advancing the story by a few hours, or days in some cases, to show how the general position and the retreat in particular affected them.

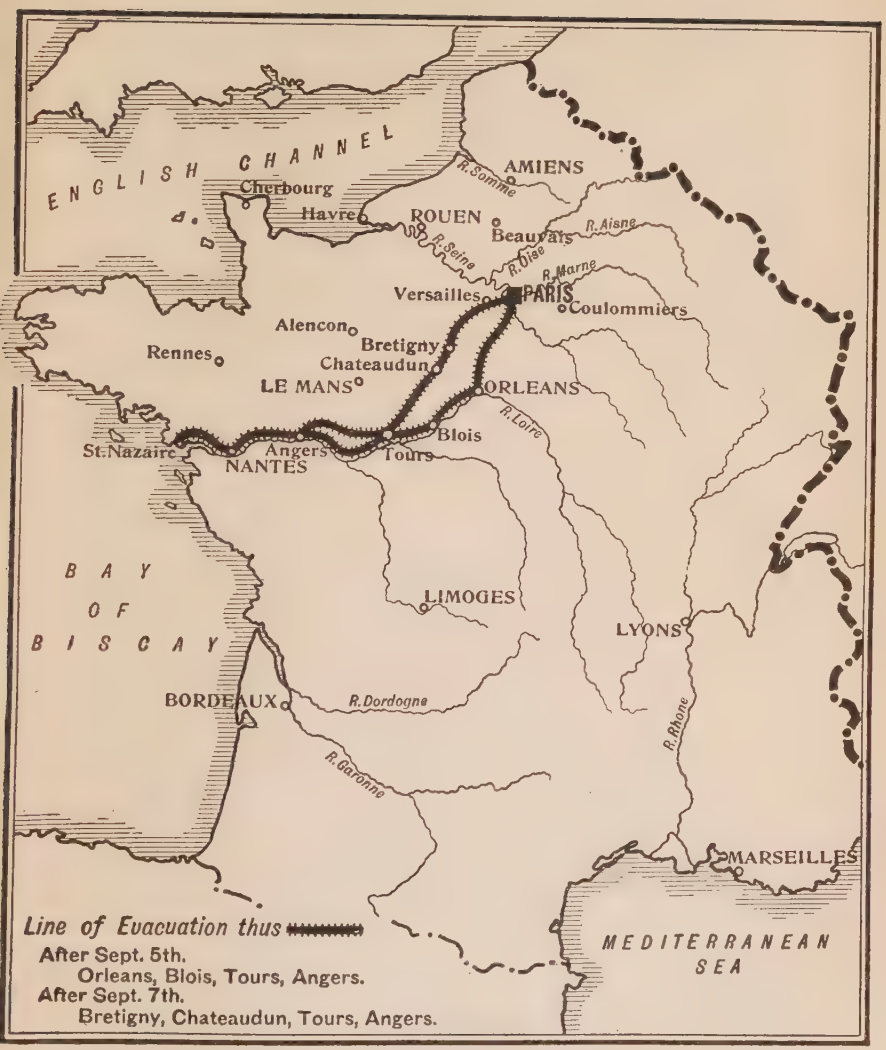
A general hospital is a compact, self-contained, partly mobile unit of the R.A.M.C. organisation. It cannot be said to travel light, for when *en route* its personnel numbers 164, including cooks, dispensers, clerks, and other people, and its matron and nurses total 43. Its equipment, marquees, beds, and what not turn the scale at something like 440 tons, so that movement of such a unit is no easy undertaking.

Yet movement, a very rapid movement, of the majority

of the twelve general hospitals and of the twelve stationary hospitals which had gone to France became necessary as the retreat brought French and British nearer Paris. Let us first take an example and show how one of the twelve general hospitals mobilised and went across the water, and what steps were taken to "open" it for the reception of sick and wounded.

Colonel M. P. Holt mobilised No. 2 General Hospital at Aldershot, commencing on August 5. On the 13th this mobilisation was completed, and the personnel was hard at work packing the hospital equipment into trucks. It took two trains to accommodate this equipment and the personnel. At Southampton all were transferred to the *Gowrie Castle*, and finally there embarked 21 officers and 1 chaplain, the principal matron, the matron, and 42 nursing sisters and 145 rank and file, and 3 horses. They arrived at Havre in due course on the 15th of August, and by the 16th had disembarked all their impedimenta and the personnel, the nursing sisters meanwhile having been sent to one of the local hotels. Preparations to open the hospital at San Vic now commenced, for here there was open ground. Marquees were erected and furnished, and the École Jeanne d'Arc was equipped for officer patients. By the following evening 100 beds were ready in the marquees, and of these 44 were occupied.

Still further accommodation was now required, and on the 20th the Palais des Regattes, and on the 21st the Gare Maritime d'Escale were taken over, and preparations were at once begun to convert them into hospitals. The latter presents the most interesting feature. It is the terminus of the railway which is built on the quay in close proximity to the water; trains run in under a huge covering, the rails and platforms filling the whole of the ground floor of the edifice. Above, there is a vast expanse of floor from which galleries lead off towards the water, and on to these gangways from ships are lowered. Thus, patients in the hospital have merely to be placed on stretchers and carried some




LINE OF EVACUATION FROM PARIS.

twenty feet to be transported to a hospital ship, an arrangement as perfect as one could imagine.

By the 23rd of August there were 100 beds fully equipped in the Gare Maritime, 45 at the Palais des Regattes, 287 at San Vic, and an additional 80 in the Casino, which had since been commandeered for hospital purposes. One hundred and sixteen of these beds were occupied by the 27th of August; there were now actually 777 beds in readiness for patients who were beginning to come down in large numbers from St. Quentin. A little consideration of the work accomplished will show how hard the personnel of this general hospital must have laboured. To have fully equipped 777 beds in ten short days was certainly something of a triumph, for it entailed the transport of tons of stores, the erection of marquees, the laying out of paths, arrangements for conveying patients to and fro and for feeding them, the allocation of nursing sisters to each annexe of the hospital and provision for their accommodation, besides endless work in cleaning and preparing buildings and organising hospital services generally.

A record of cases admitted to this hospital need not be given from day to day, but on the 28th of August 454 arrived, and on the 31st, 640. Orders were now suddenly received to pack up all equipment and prepare for embarkation, so that all the labour expended had been in vain. By the 4th of September the greater number of the personnel and the equipment had been embarked on the *Welshman*, the remainder on the *Asturias* and *Winifredian*, and all these disembarked within a day or so at St. Nazaire. At this point the utility of the unit was fatally crippled by an unfortunate error made by the shipping authorities: the *Welshman*, which contained all the hospital equipment, was sent back to England. On the 13th, however, it had been brought back. But the military situation had again altered, and No. 2 General Hospital was ordered to return at once to Havre, where it promptly re-occupied its old quarters, prepared its beds, organised

its arrangements anew and made ready for patients. (See Map V.)

Such an upheaval was not of course anticipated when this hospital crossed to France, and it requires very little consideration to realise what an enormous amount of labour and trouble was entailed in organising the various hospitals at Havre and elsewhere in the first place, in closing those same hospitals and moving to St. Nazaire on short notice, and again returning after a hunt for lost equipment and once more preparing for sick and wounded.

Yet No. 2 General Hospital was not an exception: every one of the general hospitals sent to France was uprooted just at the end of August, and the stationary hospitals likewise; for Havre and Rouen had to be abandoned, and Amiens also. The march of the Germans towards Paris even made it necessary for the French Government to transfer themselves to Bordeaux, and if Paris was threatened, so also were the towns above mentioned. As a matter of fact, Amiens was occupied by the Germans during early September, though none of the enemy entered Havre and Rouen.

No. 7 General Hospital, which had opened at Amiens, had, like the others at Havre and Rouen, beaten a hasty retreat, but unlike them it was less fortunate in regard to its equipment. Quite a little story hangs round the equipment of this general hospital. No transport was available when the sudden order arrived to evacuate Amiens, and, in consequence, the officer commanding had perforce to leave his equipment in the hospital which he had opened, and to put his personnel on to the first available train and take them out of this zone of danger. When the Germans marched in Madame Gaudin took steps to conceal this equipment—some 440 tons of it the reader is reminded, and worth a considerable sum of money. A little later, when the retreat was ended and Von Klück and Von Buelow's armies were driven back over the Marne and to the Aisne, and the left flank of the Allied Army moved northwards into Flanders,

French medical units went to Amiens and took over the very same buildings which No. 7 General Hospital had occupied in August. There they found the equipment and made use of it until about July 1915, when the South Midland Casualty Clearing Station was sent to Amiens and replaced the French Hospital unit. The equipment of No. 7 General Hospital was then handed over to this British unit; and it is satisfactory to be able to state that the British Government, recognising the great work which had been done for them in securing this material, decorated Madame Gaudin.

From what has been stated above it will now be clear that, as the British Expeditionary Force retreated towards Paris, general and stationary hospitals were diligently at work making preparations at the ports already mentioned to receive the sick and wounded as they came down by train or by ambulance wagons. It appeared at one time during that retreat that we and the French would hold the northern bank of the Aisne just where the Third Corps of the British Army rested on August 28. But this plan did not eventuate. For strategical reasons it was not deemed wise to make a stand there, and as a consequence the retreat continued, and the change of plan necessitated, as the days went by, the evacuation of British bases. Thus, as the Expeditionary Force reached the Marne and crossed it, and finally plunged into the Forest of Crécy, those bases were transferred to St. Nazaire, Le Mans, and Nantes, where in a little while sick and wounded were pouring in from the battlefields of the Marne, and particularly from the Aisne, towards the end of September.

The moment has arrived then to return to the British Expeditionary Force and show its movements during the latter days of August and until the evening of the 5th of September when the long retreat ended, and, turning about, the troops marched north-east. They had then on their left the Sixth French Army deployed along a line extending from Betz in the north to the Marne River near Meaux, and on their right other

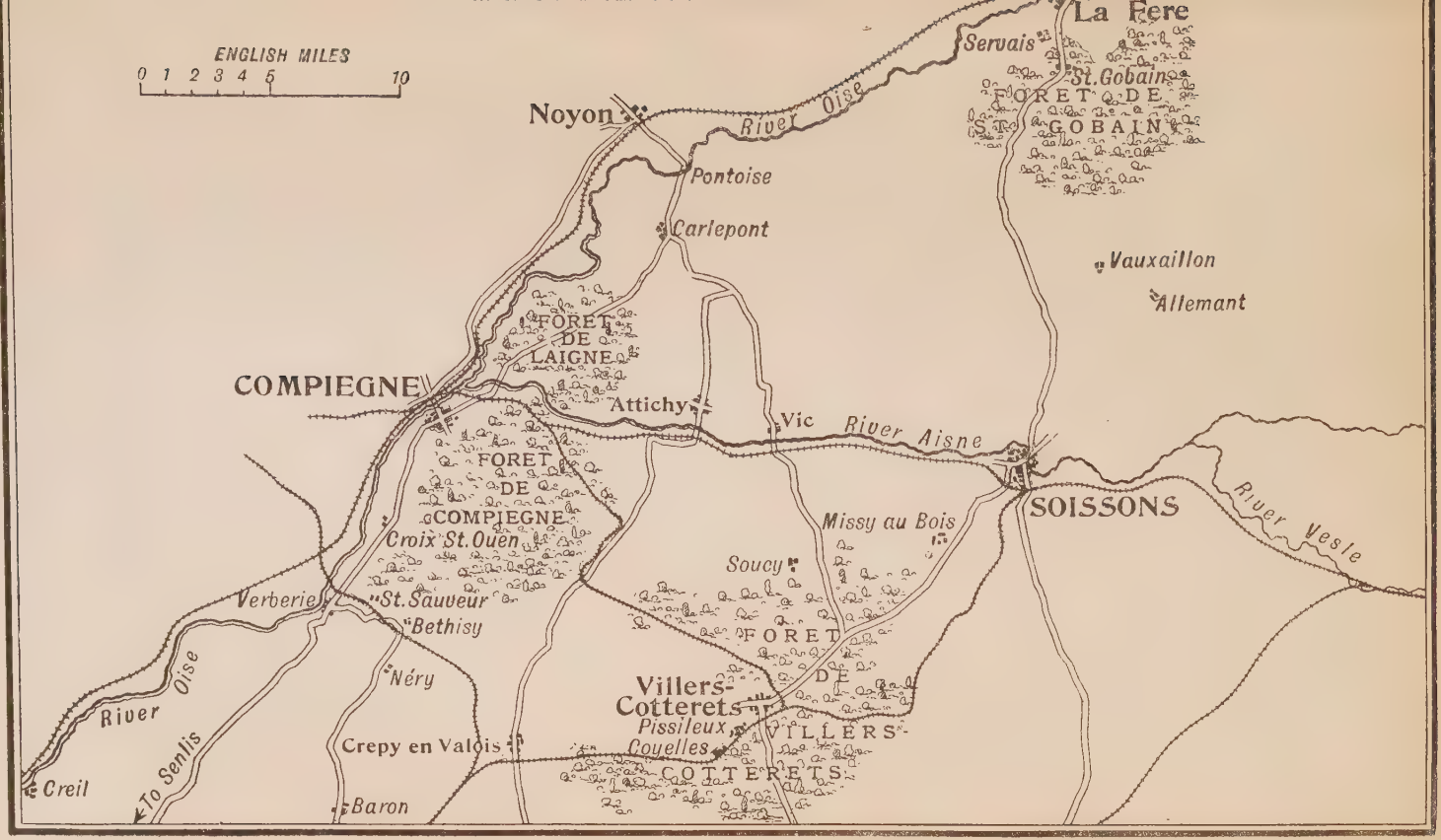
French Armies extended for many miles through country south of Chalons and Bar-le-Duc, south of the fortress of Verdun, and so to Toul and the eastern frontier of France.

Little incident marked the days in question, the troops retiring during the evening of the 29th and 30th behind their rearguards and meeting with little pressure. Those days were insufferably hot, so that the men suffered far more from exhaustion than from enemy intervention. It was on September 1, however, that two actions of considerable importance were fought—one at Néry and the other at Villers-Cotterets, in the first of which the 1st Cavalry Brigade and "L" Battery, Royal Horse Artillery, were engaged, and in the second the 6th Infantry Brigade, but mainly the 4th Guards Brigade, the same Infantry Brigade which had fought at Landrecies. (See Map VI.)

Thereafter the divisions continued their retreat to the Marne, and crossing it on the 2nd and 3rd of the month marched south and east, till on the 5th the First Division lay between Rozoy and Bernay on the right of the British Expeditionary Force, the Second between Fontenay and Chaumes on its left, the Third again to the left with the Fifth Division, and the Third Corps in the neighbourhood of Brie Comte Robert. To the right of this line which stretched roughly from Lagny near the Marne to La Chapelle Iger were the 1st, 2nd, and 4th Brigades of Cavalry, their outposts continuously in touch with the enemy who by then had crossed the Marne and the Petit Morin and were on the banks of the Grand Morin. The 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades acted as a link between the First and Second Corps.

Certain of the medical units took part in the actions at Néry and Villers-Cotterets. But first, their movement south is continued.

To begin with the cavalry field ambulances. They reached the country south of the Marne in two columns just as they had left the neighbourhood of Le Cateau,




ST. GOBAIN TO VILLERS-COTTERETS.

that half consisting of the 2nd and two sections of the 3rd crossing the river on the night of the 1st of September, when they had marched almost continuously for twenty-eight hours, traversing forty-seven miles during that period. On the 5th of September they were in the neighbourhood of Coulommiers. Scarcely one of the remaining horses of the column had now any shoes left. They had cast them *en route*, and had come along the hard roads as best they could.

The other half reached Brie Comte Robert. Just west of Noyon this portion of the cavalry field ambulance column had come in contact with the cavalry division and marched south on the west flank of the retreating army, their route taking them past the training stables at Chaumont, where Von Klück presently installed his headquarters, and through the pleasant little town of Senlis, closely adjacent. Its cobbled streets were then looked down upon by orderly rows of stone-built houses. Delightful peeps could be obtained here and there of well-kept gardens, while the town and its surroundings bore that air of comfort and elegance which have made of it an attractive haunt of the jaded Parisian seeking a week-end outing. In the course of a few days it became a wreck almost from end to end. Blackened walls now look down upon the cobbled streets; the twisted iron frames of bedsteads and half-burned furniture can be seen through the broken and shutterless windows. Only the church—a beautiful edifice,—the École St. Vincent, a British hospital in 1918, and a few isolated houses remain intact. The rest were fired separately and individually by parties of incendiary Germans as punishment for a supposed rising on the part of the unfortunate inhabitants. Some day, perhaps, the whole truth will be published and the real nature of that rising be explained, when it will appear that some patriotic Frenchman defended his own little house against some marauding Germans, and a fracas started. It ended with the prompt murder of this brave soul, the shooting of sundry peaceful citizens of Senlis, and,

finally, in the gutting of the town. It is Germany's own particular and terrible method of warfare.

The cavalry field ambulance column, however, saw nothing of all this. They tramped through the cobbled streets, turned east of south, and, crossing the Marne, reached Brie Comte Robert. This was the condition of its horse transport on the authority of Major Goodwin :

> The horses were dead-beat and so reduced in numbers that our so-called six-horse vehicles were now actually being drawn by two horses, and those tired.

Fortunately, a twenty-hour halt gave all a respite.

The 5th Cavalry Field Ambulance reached Touquin without particular incident. Medical units of the First Corps left the neighbourhood of St. Gobain on August 29, their ambulance wagons laden with sick and wounded, this because empty motor lorries which were expected to take all cases did not arrive. It was 6 P.M. then and the corps was already marching, so that there was no alternative but to bring all cases able to be moved along in the ambulance wagons, though the arrangement left little room for possible casualties *en route*. Seven severe cases were, however, abandoned in the Red Cross Hospital at St. Gobain. Then the tent divisions marched on with the baggage train, the bearers and some ambulance wagons accompanying the various brigades. On the following day, after an all-night march, No. 1 Field Ambulance successfully entrained 52 of its cases at Allemant, where there is a narrow-gauge railway. No. 2 sent 3 officers and 25 men on from their bivouac at Vauxaillon, a little north and west of Allemant, to Soissons, and No. 3 reached the latter place and evacuated 120 cases, all of which it had carried every foot of the way from St. Gobain. No wonder its ambulance teams were dead-beat. No wonder the scheme for making use of chance empty motor transport lorries was looked at askance. It had failed before. It failed now, thus hampering the medical units of the First Division, and it was to fail many times afterwards. Only when motor ambulance convoys

arrived was the evacuation of field ambulances and other medical units entirely satisfactory, for then it was swift, and—more important than all—this new transport unit was earmarked for medical units only, and was entirely under the control of medical officers. Evacuation was no longer a chance happening. It became as certain as it was swift, and the general efficiency of the Army Medical Service was enormously increased by it.

The R.A.M.C. units with the Second Division were more fortunate than those just mentioned. They spent the whole of August 29 in the refreshing shade of the forest near Servais, resting under the trees and taking every ounce of repose that was possible. From this place they sent 100 slight cases to Attichy station by motor lorry, thus clearing their ambulance wagons. Then they marched off in the cool hours of the early morning of the 30th, or very late on the 29th, traversing the Forest of St. Gobain, and so reached Soissons. With them marched the bearers of No. 19 Field Ambulance, who had escaped from Landrecies.

Men and animals again quite exhausted. To move early A.M. 31st. Divine Service held at 6 P.M.,

is the laconic statement of an officer.

Divine Service must have reminded him that only a week had passed since Sunday the 23rd of August. So much had happened in those seven days, so many miles had been traversed, and such numerous events encountered, that Mons and the German onslaught there may well have seemed to him, as undoubtedly to others, an event of weeks ago, something getting almost dim in the distance.

That Sunday in Soissons gave little promise of peaceful Sundays in the future. The ancient town which stands astride the deep and sluggish Aisne had seen the Prussian at its gates on a former occasion : for here in 1870 the Grand Duke of Mecklenburg forced its surrender and captured its garrison, having for some four days bombarded the city. One could still see in

1914 the mark of the Prussian of those days, for one of the two towers of the Cathedral which watch over the city was battered near its summit, and the people of Soissons, perhaps to keep the fact in mind lest some should tend to forget it, had failed to repair the place. To-day Soissons is a graceful wreck following the German drive in 1918, and the subsequent counter-drive on the part of the Allies.

The narrow streets and the quaint ancient places of the city were teeming with life as the field ambulances marched in. Troops of the Second Division were blocking the approaches and pushing on toward the bridges. Behind, in the forest country which crowns the long, high ridge which overshadows the northern bank of the Aisne, German Uhlans in great strength were cautiously moving toward the river, taught by previous encounters with British troops to keep at a respectful distance. Perhaps had they pushed on boldly and made a slashing attack upon our rearguards they might have in some measure affected the orderly crossing of the Aisne. But they did nothing of the sort. Caution was the predominant note of their manœuvring. So the troops gained the south bank without interruption, though it was long before the people of Soissons were to enjoy tranquillity. The British ebb left them high and dry with Germans in occupation. The tide of Allied troops rolled back out of sight to the south-east of Paris. Then it surged north again, and soon in place of British troops French Colonials were swarming in the city, which, like Rheims, farther to east, and every village to the immediate east of it, was to support an intermittent deluge of shells until the French advance in 1917 relieved it. Unfortunately, however, the German drive in 1918 overran the spot again, and as a consequence Soissons is now a shattered heap of masonry, scarcely a house having escaped damage.

Second Corps medical units now claim attention. All three field ambulances of the Third Division reached Vic-sur-Aisne during the course of the 30th August, after

a night march from south of Noyon. Doubtless they revelled in the rest they now obtained down by the Aisne River, and made the utmost of the trees and shade which are here such a feature of the valley. "The war now seemed to be a long way off," one of the officers tells us cheerily.

Medical units of the Fifth Division likewise reached the Aisne, west of Vic, and therefore in a part far more enclosed and wooded. Compiègne was but a few miles west of them, and thither they were able to send their sick and wounded, for one of the British ambulance wagons was to call at the railway station where the tent division of No. 7 Field Ambulance was then officiating as a rest-station party.

The Third Corps medical units had so far been more conspicuous by their absence than anything else, for the one section of the 19th Field Ambulance attached to the 19th Infantry Brigade was the sole medical unit present at Le Cateau. Even this was now absent, for reaching St. Quentin after strenuous work at Reumont on the 26th August, it had entrained with details of exhausted Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, and finally detrained at Crépy-en-Valois on the 31st. But on the 29th Nos. 10 and 12 Field Ambulances at last reported to the Fourth Division, and set off on the southern march with it. No. 11 had had most distressing fortune; for some error on the part of the railway authorities had sent it to Amiens, and thence to Rouen. However, its commanding officer contrived to get sent north again, and detrained his unit at Creil, south-west of Compiègne, whence he marched off in search of the division. But it was not till the 1st of September, when heavy firing drew his unit towards Néry, that he came in contact with the British Expeditionary Force. Curiously enough he had stumbled upon his comrades of Nos. 10 and 12 Field Ambulances, and at once moved into action with them. Meanwhile the Fourth Division and Nos. 10 and 12 Field Ambulances reached the River Aisne, and like those to the east of them made ready to cross it.

The 31st August found the whole British Expeditionary Force with its medical units south of the Aisne River. They had come by various routes so as to allow of more rapid progress ; and leaving the northern heights had crossed the valley at varying points between Soissons and Compiègne. Destroying bridges as they left the water, they clambered thence to the south by steep ascents towards the country across which stretches the Forest of Villers-Cotterets—a country of steep undulations and many dense copses which made surprise attacks by a pursuing enemy probable. Those farther to the west plunged into the Forest of Compiègne or traversed its borders, so that on the night of the 31st the First Corps was in the neighbourhood of Missy-au-Bois and Soucy, the Second near Coyelles and Crépy-en-Valois, the Third Corps at Verberie, while the cavalry were for the most part south of the infantry.

The morrow was to bring a change in the conditions of the retreat, though no alleviation of the weariness of our soldiers. The same heat was to be a feature of the early days of September, while long, continuous marches, and the nightmare of unending movement, with little sleep, continued. But pressure in the west was to be increased. The enemy, who had been holding off since Le Cateau, was now coming on rapidly, and information on the 1st September proved that at least two divisions of cavalry were pressing south, endeavouring to break up the retreating columns. There was another significant feature which was observed now for the first time : no longer were Von Klück's men marching in a south-westerly direction ; they were turned towards the south-east. The First German Army in fact had changed its direction, and was now setting out on a line which, if continued, would carry it across the face of the retreating British Force, as if to ignore its very existence. That march ended on the Marne and the Morin Rivers. The cavalry pressure to which we have referred led to the actions at Néry and Villers-Cotterets, which are now related.

# CHAPTER X

Néry, Villers-Cotterets—End of the retreat—Burden of evacuation entirely thrown on field ambulances—Difficulties confronted by the R.A.M.C.—Lessons taught by the retreat—The demand for motor ambulances—Situation south of the Marne and prior to the advance of 6th September.

## Néry

A WARM, clammy fog, herald of another grilling day, overhung the valley of the Oise, the picturesque churches and houses of Compiègne, and the sluggish waters of the Aisne where they join with those of the Oise. It was still early in the morning of the 1st of September, and as yet the men of the various units of the British Expeditionary Force lay asleep or peered about them wondering what was the nature of their new surroundings. East of Compiègne they lay in wooded dells, or in country overshadowed by the forest of Villers-Cotterets, through which runs the main road from Soissons to Paris. West of the line the troops had almost cleared the vast stretch of the Forest of Compiègne, while others had crossed the valley to its south and had clambered to the uplands where stand Crépy-en-Valois and other pleasant places.

In Compiègne itself the Grande Place before the massive façade of the palace was grey with German uniforms and dotted thick with guns and horses. In the hotels which face the palace and look into the Place German officers were just stirring in the comfortable beds which they had requisitioned, while others of the cavalry were long since afoot and riding through the forest. On the 31st August they had hardly been in touch with troopers of the 1st Cavalry Brigade, though they had seen them

retire quietly enough across the shallow valley which runs east and west, south of the forest, and clamber to the heights of Néry. There, in the neighbourhood of the straggling stone-built village and the Sucrerie which cap the bare top of the ridge, they had seen them disappear for the moment, and there they blundered into the 1st Cavalry Brigade as the all-pervading mist was dissipated.

First, however, there was the rearguard of the Fourth Division to be dealt with, and in the very early hours advance troops of the enemy slowly forced them out of the forest and through the misty valley south of it till they lay not far from Néry. Long before this retirement had been brought about, the Grande Place in Compiègne, where the Maid of Orleans once stepped in her armour, and where indeed the Burgundians captured her in 1430 and straightway handed her over to the English, was astir, and already reinforcements of infantry and guns were marching south-east through the forest.

Above, on the ridge, the 1st Cavalry Brigade had stabled their horses in the one long straggling street of the village and had secured billets in the houses. The overflow, for there were too many of them for such a small place, had bivouacked in the open at the far end of the village, between it and the Sucrerie, picketing their horses on ground overlooked from the east by a second ridge which creeps south from the foot of the ridge rising to Néry, forming with it the figure Y inverted.

One traverses typical English wooded country south of the Forest of Compiègne. The road from St. Sauveur leads south and east into a pleasant wooded valley, where streams meander beside numerous country lanes, and where peeps are obtained of hamlets and farms and patches of open pasture. Then the road leads up the ridge to Néry, still wooded, though less so, till the bare cap of the ridge is reached. On the left lies a dismantled railway and a shattered viaduct, while farther off, diverging as it runs south, is the other arm of the ridge, ending in a knoll opposite, and some 500 yards from Néry.

There in the early hours German cavalry and guns assembled under the cloak of fog, blundered into close range of the British, and from that point opened fire, as the fog lifted, on the 2nd Dragoon Guards and on the gunners of "L" Battery, Royal Horse Artillery.

Two German batteries and machine-guns firing at point-blank range had, as was to be expected, the most destructive effect on the unsuspecting Dragoons and gunners. Their horses stampeded at once, and went galloping through the village. Men of "L" Battery, just then watering their horses, were carried away with them and were unable to get back. But officers and men in the neighbourhood promptly rallied. While the cavalry sheltered behind vehicles and haystacks, and opened fire on the enemy who were still barely visible, the gunners, in spite of shrapnel and machine-gun bullets, man-handled three guns into position. Two of these were put out of action almost at once. But the third, manned by Captain Bradbury, Lieutenants Campbell and Mundy, Sergeant Nelson, Gunner Derbyshire and others, kept up a rapid return fire until Captain Bradbury and Lieutenant Campbell were killed and Lieutenant Mundy and Sergeant Nelson severely wounded, and all the ammunition was expended.

Meanwhile the men of the 1st Cavalry Brigade had seized the nearest and best cover, and opening with machine-guns and rifles did much execution amongst the enemy gunners. The sound of gun-fire now brought the 4th Cavalry Brigade and the 1st Middlesex Regiment of the 19th Infantry Brigade toward the spot, and in the end eight German guns and a number of prisoners were captured, the enemy being chased off the ridge and a mile back towards the forest.

In the early morning mist the 10th and 12th Field Ambulances stood by as the Inniskillings held off enemy cavalry advancing on Verberie, and presently were treating wounded. Then the sound of firing at Néry attracted their attention, and at once bearers were sent off with ambulance wagons. At the same moment

No. 11 Field Ambulance, which had not yet got in touch with its division, heard the sound of conflict and set off toward Néry, pushing one of its bearer subdivisions and ambulance wagons in advance of the main party on receipt of a message from the 1st Cavalry Brigade asking urgently for assistance. Later the tent subdivisions opened a dressing station in which some forty men of the Dragoon Guards and "L" Battery were treated. Nos. 10 and 12 Field Ambulances also collected cases, and in the end the three field ambulances marched away to Baron with 160 wounded.

They left one officer behind to bury the dead. Doubtless not all were found, for only the ridge on which the village of Néry is perched is treeless. Men died in the wooded hollow down below, and these the peasants found, when pursued and pursuers had gone on, and buried with becoming honour. The calvary which shelters under a little clump of trees at the end of the village, where the road forks, presents in the centre of the triangle of green turf at its foot two mounds, kept decked with flowers, whereon are the following inscriptions :

"Sept Soldats Anglais inconnus" and "Deux Allemands."

The final stage in the narrative of Néry is even more depressing. The three field ambulances reached Baron carrying some 200 cases, which were placed in a château. Lack of means of evacuation again wrecked what might have been a fine achievement for the medical service. Not all the ambulance wagons could be devoted to these wounded, for some must be sent with the rearguard and others with the main body of the division. There was no railway, and a column of empty motor lorries which might have given great assistance was sent off before the requirements of the R.A.M.C. had been ascertained. There was therefore nothing else to be done than to work all night dressing the wounded, and then to move off at dawn, leaving them in the care of a medical officer and some orderlies provided by one of the field ambu-

lances. Lieutenant T. Warrington and "B" Section tent subdivision of No. 12 Field Ambulance remained, and saw their comrades march off as the dawn began to break on the morning of the 2nd. Some 130 wounded lay in the château, for the ambulance wagons carried a total of seventy.

### Villers-Cotterets

The forest through which the First and Second Corps retreated as Néry was being fought stretches from within short distance of Soissons to the gates of the town of Villers-Cotterets and thence to La Ferte Milon in one direction, and to Crépy-en-Valois in the other. It presents an almost impenetrable barrier, so that the fighting which ensued as the 4th Guards Brigade retired through the glades which bisect it was of the most confused nature. North of Villers-Cotterets the Guards were set on quite early in the morning. Later they were again in action near Pisseleux, where the fighting developed into a desperate struggle, much bayonet work being indulged in by both sides and small parties of Guards being opposed to broken units of German infantry. By 7 P.M. the action was over, the enemy drew off, and the troops were able to continue their retirement.

Rather more than eighty wounded were picked up by the depleted bearers of No. 4 Field Ambulance and by those of the 5th Field Ambulance, and these were treated first in an advanced dressing station near an adjacent sugar factory where the remainder of No. 4 Field Ambulance was stationed, and later some two miles back, at a dressing station opened by No. 5 Field Ambulance. All night long the work of attending and evacuating the wounded went on, till all had been dressed and despatched to the south. Dawn came and found the remnants of No. 4 Field Ambulance alone, for troops had moved off and no warning had been sent, so that it—or what was left of the unit, for the majority

had been taken at Landrecies—narrowly escaped capture. No. 5 Field Ambulance, farther back, had a somewhat similar experience, for it was still hampered in its movements by the presence of wounded. However, with the assistance of Major-General Monro, some empty motor lorries were requisitioned, and having cleared the dressing station "just in time," the unit moved off rapidly toward the Marne River.

There is little more to tell of the doings of the medical units during the days which followed. For the most part all the field ambulances had divided into tent and bearer divisions, and had sent the tent divisions and the heavier equipment of each unit with the baggage train of the divisions. This made swifter movement of the bearer divisions possible, but had one objection, that in the event of serious action the bearers might have been deprived of valuable and necessary equipment. But something must give way to military necessity. Mobility was an essential, and as it happened the bearers and their ambulance wagons did excellent work during those early days of September. Numbers of stragglers were carried, for the retreat was telling upon some of the men severely. Want of sleep was the most prominent need, so that at every halt officers and men sat down on the road and dropped off, or even fell asleep in their saddles on the march, wobbling dangerously, and awakening of a sudden to just save a catastrophe.

During those final days the ambulance wagons and their diminished teams, when not carrying exhausted men, brought along packs and greatcoats, thus relieving the troops of weight and making marching easier for them. But it told upon the horses.

"We are now absolutely on our last legs," writes the officer commanding a field ambulance.

It was the same with the majority of the others. Some had had to abandon vehicles *en route* because of foundered horses, others had made useful exchanges of beasts by arrangement with French farmers eager to assist the British, and yet again others had brought their

VILLERS-COTTERETS TO SOUTH-EAST OF PARIS.

ambulance wagons along by literally harnessing their weary men to them. No surprise need therefore be expressed when officers speak of the jaded condition of their R.A.M.C. personnel, and describe how they reached the cool, shady depths of the Forest of Crécy south of the Marne as footsore as any of the men of the fighting units. (See Map VII.)

Yet muscles alone were weary. A good sleep and rest and a well-cooked meal did wonders. The news spread that the British Expeditionary Force had finished retreating. It was bruited abroad amidst those leafy bivouacs that the troops were to advance and try conclusions with the Germans. The rumour acted like a charm and a tonic.

"The men turned north whistling and laughing and in the best of spirits," says one of the officers with them.

Reviewing those strenuous August and September days, the officers and men of the medical units could not look back upon them but as to a nightmare of events in which, while striving with all their might and main, they had not performed quite as they would have wished to. The strain of continued rapid movement and of frequent action had told upon the fighting units also, it is true, but in their case the abandoning of positions after they had served their purpose was part of their orders. The throwing away of kits, spare ammunition, and other heavy material, too, was a military necessity which lessened in no way the record of their wonderful achievement.

But the R.A.M.C. had been dealing with human lives. It is its province to succour and remove the wounded, so that one and all, whether officers or men, deeply deplored the necessity which had compelled them to abandon their cases. It was not a question of personal courage, of the spirit of the corps, of its willingness, its eagerness to sacrifice its members for the patients it tended. In the course of this war, as in previous wars, the medical services have provided too many instances of heroism and of personal sacrifice to bring that into

question. It was simply and absolutely a question of the inadequacy of horse transport, which, it will be shown, crippled German field medical units just as severely during the Marne operations.

The exceptionally trying circumstances of the retreat, with its continued and never-ending movement, first threw the whole onus of evacuation on the field ambulances, and then wrecked their efficiency by wearing out the teams of the ambulance wagons. Could clearing hospitals and ambulance trains have given them adequate support, the case might well have been different. But the retreat put the former out of action at an early stage, and reduced the effectiveness of the latter. Thus, to their grief, the R.A.M.C. emerged from this trial with the consciousness of duty done, yet with the knowledge that something in their organisation or their equipment had denied them the success for which they, like all, were striving.

For all that, theirs is a record of hard and conscientious work. That fatal lack of transport so clearly crippling their utility now forced itself so prominently upon the attention of all parties that instant steps were taken to rectify it. As on many another occasion, the B.R.C.S. leaped into the breach. Sir A. Keogh, the Chief Commissioner, was then in Paris, and as the weary field ambulances gained the south of the Marne, he wired insistently to London for motor ambulances. It will be seen that under other conditions, while still assisted only by horse transport, the R.A.M.C. did great things during the advance over the Marne.

One lesson, therefore, had been burned into the minds of those who controlled the medical service. Given efficient units, adequate transport was the essence of their successful operation. A second was also absorbed, relating likewise to the evacuation of the sick and wounded. The scheme whereby at least two empty motor transport lorries of the supply column were to be available per division for the clearing of cases had proved worse than useless. This accentuated the demand for

motor ambulance convoys and made their supply imperative. A third was just as clearly forced upon the attention of the authorities. Not only was the mobility of field ambulances less than it should be, but that also of clearing hospitals was jeopardised by want of motor traction and by the need to carry useless stores of heavy equipment. Marquees, useful and essential in an undeveloped country, were, generally speaking, unnecessary in France, where buildings abounded. Thus the retreat had during the short but strenuous period during which it lasted taught valuable lessons, and acting upon these, defects were made good, mobility was studied, and the advance over the Marne and the battle of the Aisne found the British Expeditionary Force supplied with medical units able and efficient to deal with all wounded.

Another critical stage in these early weeks of what was soon to be a world war had arrived. The retreat was done with. Mons and Maroilles and Landrecies and Le Cateau were now only a memory. Von Klück and Von Buelow, believing the British Expeditionary Force to have been put out of action, were pushing south, and on the evening of the 3rd of September were concentrating with other German armies between Coulommiers and Verdun. For the moment Paris and a sensational entry into the capital were ignored. Britain, it appeared, was beaten. The French Army, still in being, must be broken in halves, and those halves divided and defeated piecemeal.

The 6th of September then saw the armies of Von Klück and Von Buelow directed against the French to the east of Coulommiers, while it found the Sixth French Army approaching the right flank of Von Klück's army on the line of the Ourcq, the British marching north-east from behind a line stretching between La Chapelle Iger and Lagny to join with it, and the remaining French armies holding fast from Provins to Verdun till opportunity opened for the Ninth Army—recently brought from the eastern frontier—to enter the contest and force retreat upon the enemy. (See Map VIII.)

The battle of the Marne and most of its honours belong to the French. Yet some were earned by good, honest British fighting, and in this it will be seen that medical units, field ambulances, and clearing hospitals also on this occasion, played no unworthy part and lent their assistance in the defeat of the Germans.

BATTLE POSITIONS ON THE MARNE.

# CHAPTER XI

The Marne country—The military situation—A review of the medical situation—Confusion at St. Nazaire, etc.—Arrival of the Sixth Division—The timely help of the British Red Cross Society—Medical situation in the United Kingdom—Provision of more medical units—Sir A. Keogh returns to the War Office as D.G.A.M.S.—Commencement of expansion of existing Army Medical Service.

The River Marne flows through country as diverse as could be imagined: through bleak rolling chalk downs far to the east near Chalons-sur-Marne, where its waters are turbid with mud from the swamps about Vitry. From Épernay, the seat of the champagne trade, to Château-Thierry, it meanders between banks of varied colour, to which cling acres of vine, and thence to Meaux by way of La Ferte-sous-Jouarre, zig-zagging and doubling and twisting, encompassed by steep banks on either hand, which stand far back from the river or hug it closely, and which, wooded to the south, are open and wind-swept on the north, and present a mosaic of fields of vines and maize and wheat and crops of every variety which cling to the hillsides.

On a fine day no prettier country could be discovered than this stretch from Château-Thierry to La Ferte-sous-Jouarre. Villages such as Charly-sur-Marne, Mery and Nogent, with their grey stone houses and curling, cobbled streets, look down upon the placid broad surface of the river, while hundreds of farms nestle in the flats which form the floor of the valley, lush meadows all about them, cattle sunk knee-deep grazing on the rich pasture.

South and east of La Ferte-sous-Jouarre the Petit Morin runs its gentle devious course from Montmirail,

winding always, embowered in trees, flowing through an undulating wooded country which supports many a village ; Sablonnières, Boitron, and others, all stone built, moss-grown and picturesque, and all filled with German infantry and gunners on the morning of the 6th of September.

Farther south the Grand Morin runs its placid course through similar country, from Esternay to La Ferte-Gaucher, and thence to Coulommiers, and so past Crécy to Esbly, where its waters join those of the Marne. South again still are other streams, less important than the two Morin rivers and offering no opposition to a crossing. The Petit Morin, however, provided the Germans with quite formidable rearguard positions. The Marne is wider and deeper, though its crossing, once German rearguards had been driven from its northern bank was, as a general rule, a matter of extreme ease, seeing that the enemy neglected to destroy the bridges. Farther west, near Meaux, they were down, for our sappers had seen to that thoroughly as the British Expeditionary Force retreated ; but east of Meaux they were, with few exceptions, standing, though the German break through between Château-Thierry and Dormans in 1918 led to further destruction.

It is the country between Meaux on the one hand and La Ferte-Gaucher on the Grand Morin, Montmirail on the Petit Morin, and Château-Thierry on the Marne, in which interest as regards the British Expeditionary Force mainly centres. Facing north-east behind the forests of Armainvillers and Crécy the three corps under Sir J. French's command, now reinforced to some extent though still under strength, scattered parties rejoined or rejoining, and field ambulances once more close behind their respective divisions, marched through the belt of country just outlined, and having crossed the rivers, turned due north on a course just east of and parallel to that followed during the retreat to Paris till they once more gained the valley of the Aisne.

The Marne, so far as the British Expeditionary Force

was concerned, was not a pitched battle in which the whole force was simultaneously deployed and engaged. It was an advance of several columns moving parallel across a country which gave numerous opportunities to enemy rearguards. Thus, now this column, then that, and at times several together, became engaged in stubbornly contested combats, and were often appreciably delayed by well-handled enemy forces. But the British Expeditionary Force was not to be denied. It swept resistance aside, forced its resolute way to the north, and finally, on the 9th September, gained a point which placed Von Klück's army in jeopardy. He had to retreat, and retreat swiftly, to save his communications. Had he hesitated to do so, or delayed the movement for but a few hours, the British Expeditionary Force would have been behind him, and Von Klück's force would have been between the hammer of the British Expeditionary Force and the anvil of the Sixth French Army.

To east and to west of the British Expeditionary Force the fighting, which has taken its name from the river about which the struggle raged, was of as stubborn and sanguinary a nature as any which had preceded it. Its description, even if it were but a broad one, would occupy many pages, and would no better assist this record of the medical services than will a few short sentences.

Briefly then. Von Klück and Von Buelow, now south of the Marne, and the troops of the former leader across the Grand Morin and entering the forest of Crécy and the country south of Coulommiers, La Ferte-Gaucher, and other places, were faced by French armies along the line to Verdun, the Fifth being on the immediate right of the British and the particular objective of Von Klück and Von Buelow. But a new element was now introduced into the conflict. Just as the British left had been *en l'air* in the neighbourhood of Condé and Le Cateau, and continually so till it was covered by Paris, so was Von Klück's right flank exposed to a flanking attack as his divisions marching south-east from Compiègne

crossed the Ourcq and pushed down to the east of that river. It was in fact the Sixth French Army which provided this new element of surprise and changed the general situation with dramatic swiftness. Thrown into the country west of the Ourcq, and reinforced by every available poilu, the Sixth French Army hurled itself upon Von Klück's exposed right, drove in his cavalry and infantry screens, and so reached the river. Meanwhile, from west to east French troops held firm against the onslaught of German armies, while the British, whom the Germans had lost sight of behind the Forest of Crécy, and whom they imagined disorganised and beaten, felt their way also toward the German flank, driving his cavalry screens across the two Morin rivers.

The threat to Von Klück's right caused him at once to move to the west, and opened a gap between his and Von Buelow's armies, into which the French thrust with decision. Then a second reserve French Army, the Ninth, under General Foch, flung itself on to Von Buelow, drove deep into the ranks of his corps, rolled up his line, and made retreat imperative. That was on the 9th of September, when British troops were crossing over the Marne and threatening Von Klück's communications, and when the Sixth French Army had struck hard and continuously at the German right flank. Like Von Buelow's corps, those of Von Klück had to retreat, and did so, leaving rearguards to cover the movement till the Aisne was reached and a position which gave opportunities for a strong defensive action.

A review of the military situation permits a broad review of that appertaining to the medical services. The Marne operations were the very opposite of the retreat to Paris, a rapid, almost continuous movement, only in a forward direction on this occasion. It provided numbers of wounded who needed attention, but in this case, it, because of the forward nature of the movement, gave far better and more numerous opportunities for evacuation. If it be thought that the abandonment of

British wounded during the retreat to Paris was a matter to be much regretted, it should at once be brought to notice that German field ambulances left wounded in every town and village through which our troops pursued them, and left them also many a time exposed and unattended on the field of battle. As in the case of the British retreat, German transport for wounded proved insufficient; so that here, on the part of the Germans now, was repeated precisely what had happened during those ten strenuous days of forced marching and pitched battle between Mons and Paris. But one difference needs to be mentioned. At Maroilles, at Landrecies, in Reumont, and at Baron and elsewhere, officers and men of our field ambulances remained to tend the wounded for whom there was no transport or who could not be removed because of their condition. In the action of the Marne German wounded were simply left, unattended, field lazarettes of Von Klück's Army retreating with the troops with which they were serving. In this way medical units with the British Expeditionary Force had their duties added to considerably, for numbers of Germans needed attention.

The advance over the Marne showed practically for the first time the excellence of British Field Ambulance organisation, and brought to prominence the real value of a unit so constituted that within minutes only it could be cleft asunder into two halves, or even more minutely divided, each division remaining completely equipped for the work of tending wounded. Undoubtedly, inadequacy of transport still hampered these units; but the conditions being now reversed, abandonment of wounded was out of the question. During a week of rapid advance the scheme of evacuation so often practised on peace manœuvres was carried out successfully. Bearer sections of the field ambulances marched with the troops, carrying only light equipment. The tent divisions and the heavy stuff, the bulk of the ambulance wagons and baggage wagons went with the divisional train, following the fighting troops, catching them up

at nightfall, and at once relieving the bearer divisions of the cases they had collected.

Clearing hospitals now for the first time had an opportunity of lending assistance, and were able to really perform the function for which they were inaugurated. They followed as closely as convenient on the heels of the advancing divisions, selected schools, railway stations, any available buildings, and opening within an hour or two, as they were well able to do, relieved the tent divisions of field ambulances of their cases, setting ambulance wagons free to return at once, and so allowing these heavier sections of the field ambulances to move on after the bearer divisions. Numbers of wounded came to the clearing hospitals on empty motor lorries of the supply columns, which, during the action of the Marne gave great assistance in evacuation, though the before-mentioned objection to their use was still as prominent a feature. Not yet had the careful selection of cases become a cult amongst the officers of the R.A.M.C. What with the rush and hurry of the advance, and the terribly wet weather which soon prevailed, there was no time and no opportunity for selection. Nor was the need as yet so apparent. The coming, within a week or two, of the first motor ambulance convoy deferred the matter still further, for it made use of the motor lorry less necessary. It was only when siege warfare had really commenced, when British offensives on a large scale produced casualties of corresponding magnitude, and when evacuation of wounded was reduced to a fine art, as it has long since become, that selection, or rather, classification of all wounded became a *sine qua non*, and none entered vehicles of the supply columns but were fitted for that comparatively rough avenue of evacuation.

The general medical scheme during the Marne is completed by reference to the stationary and general hospitals and depots of medical stores, etc. Mention has been made of the hurried exodus from Havre, Rouen, and Amiens. The upheaval caused by this unexpected movement might well have disorganised the plans of

any D.M.S. Indeed the question of organising anew was out of the hands of Surgeon-General Woodhouse for days together, during which these heavier and only partly mobile units were *en route*, jumbled together on hastily allotted vessels, stores and personnel mixed, and all dumped at St. Nazaire, or higher up the river Loire at Nantes, in the most confusing manner. It was only by strenuous effort that the confusion was finally overcome, and units at length assembled together. Unforeseen events assisted to make the task even more difficult. For once general hospitals were dumped at one of the above-mentioned ports, railway transport became almost out of the question. Other base depots, of ordnance, of supply, of every other branch of the British Army, had likewise made a hurried leave-taking of French bases farther north, and were stumbling over one another at St. Nazaire and Nantes and Le Mans. To add to the congestion, the Sixth Division, part of the striking force long since trained for service overseas, but till now retained in England, was now arriving at St. Nazaire, and its transport toward the Aisne filled the railway trucks and made movement of medical units, such as stationary hospitals or general hospitals, with their tons of equipment, a feature of the greatest difficulty. The D.M.S. might requisition trains, might issue insistent demands, might urge the extreme importance of the immediate movement of hospitals so as to make ready for expected wounded. Requests and demands were alike unavailing, seeing that the railways were already overtaxed with the work of transporting troops and reinforcements.

The medical situation, therefore, as it concerns the stationary and general hospitals just about this period, was one of more or less unavoidable confusion. Some were opening at St. Nazaire and Nantes and Le Mans. Others awaited orders, the personnel lodged in sheds on the dock-side, the equipment dumped on the quay, nurses in the hotels, where the only suitable accommodation could be obtained for them. Then the congestion

of the railways was lessened, and with it Von Klück's threat to Rouen and Havre, so that return to those bases became possible and expedient. Thither, in fact, general hospitals began to move the moment transport could be found for them, often enough returning to the very same quarters which they had been so diligently preparing as hospitals when the order to evacuate Rouen and Havre reached them.

In the meanwhile the British Expeditionary Force was over the Marne and marching through torrents of rain into the Aisne country. Wounded were now pouring into and through Paris, where hospital beds were found at first by the French authorities and by the Paris branch of the B.R.C.S. Rest-station parties had been despatched at an early date to important stations on the line of railway to St. Nazaire, and ambulance trains, now increased in number and already vastly improved (for corridor coaches had been added and communication was now possible and nurses could be carried), were moving up and down the line, following the advance of the British Expeditionary Force, and hurrying cases from the clearing hospitals to those stationary and general hospitals which were open. One of these, No. 4 General Hospital, was sent to Versailles on the 12th September, and taking over the Trianon Hotel, a German-owned concern, soon had an up-to-date hospital which helped the medical situation immensely at a time when the strain upon it was almost overwhelming.

The general medical situation in France at this period of the Marne, and until the movement of the heavier base medical units had been ended, may be said to have presented confusion on the part of the latter, and increasing utility and a "getting into their stride" condition on the part of the more mobile units. The latter had endured trials in the days of that strenuous retreat to Paris, and, taught much and hardened by the experience, were now carrying out their duties with a precision and a celerity which were remarkable.

They had crossed the Marne and marched through

the Forest of Crécy short of officers and men, and in some cases short of materials, for the strain upon their horses had had to be lessened by abandoning a portion. But the D.M.S. had promptly made good the position by sending to the front every available officer and man of the R.A.M.C. engaged upon the lines of communication, and by rushing up the reserve stores and equipment carried by his depots of medical stores. It may be added that Surgeon-General Woodhouse so handled a difficult situation both now and later that his name was specially brought to the fore in the earliest despatches.

Base units, on the other hand, so nearly settled towards the end of August, to the personnel of which the events of the retreat came but as a rumour, were, for reasons above enumerated, in some cases idle or not fully employed, or, where the circumstances had provided transport to some favourable situation, were crowded with cases and worked almost to a standstill. It was a situation which righted itself, but not before the battle of the Marne was ended, and hardly before that of the Aisne had terminated.

At times it was critical, for ambulance trains rolled into Nantes laden with sick and wounded for whom there was not adequate hospital accommodation. The same conditions existed at St. Nazaire, while hospitals at Le Mans were filled to overflowing. Fortunately, however, there were hospital ships lying at Nantes and St. Nazaire, and these practically saved the situation, which indeed improved daily as transport became available and hospitals were able to open.

The hospital ships included the *Asturias*, a typical floating hospital, most completely fitted and admirably adapted for the purpose. *En passant*, it is of interest to record that she carried large numbers of wounded in 1914, and continued to do so during 1915 and 1916. On the 1st February 1915 she narrowly escaped the torpedo of a German submarine, for U-boat warfare respects the Red Cross no more than the flag of neutrals. Finally, on the night of March 20–21, 1917, when sailing with

a full complement of wounded, the *Asturias* was torpedoed without warning. Thirty-one of the R.A.M.C. and crew were killed by the explosion, and twelve of the passengers were lost by drowning. Of these two were nurses, proof positive, if any were indeed needed, that the Germans hold nothing and no one sacred.

At Le Mans the problem was solved by at once preparing a convalescent camp, which admitted many hundreds of stragglers from the retreat, none of whom required hospital treatment, but merely rest and quiet for a few days, when they would be fit to return to their duties.

In spite of the difficulties which have been enumerated, and of the existing confusion at St. Nazaire and other new bases, it is an undoubted fact that the wounded soldier coming from the fighting area on the Marne during the first ten days of September was better and more expeditiously cared for than in August. Hurried evacuation was no longer so essential. Ambulance trains were much improved, and nurses were on them. Regular halts on the long line of evacuation were arranged, where detachments of the R.A.M.C. or of the B.R.C.S., with nurses again to assist them, fed and dressed the cases or took charge of those whose condition was too grave to allow of further travel. For these there were beds available in Paris and Angers, and others at Le Mans, where a long halt was ordered. At Nantes or St. Nazaire, there were beds in tented hospitals or in requisitioned buildings, and if not there, then in the hospital ships lying in the river.

The occasion is opportune for mention of the B.R.C.S. Like the R.A.M.C. it was at the commencement of a vast expansion. Its organisation had long since been established, it had numbers of willing workers, funds at command, and its chief commissioner, Sir A. Keogh, who knew all that there was to know about the Army Medical Service and its needs, was on the spot, his headquarters at Paris. His demand on London for motor ambulances was bearing fruit, for they were

already arriving. Many a private owner in those early days of the war tore a limousine or other luxurious body from the chassis of his car, bought at sight an ambulance body, and shipped himself and car to France to work with the British Expeditionary Force. The Marne saw little of them. It was too early as yet. But they were on the Aisne a little later, particularly those from Paris, and amongst them at least one American; and so they continued till motor ambulance convoys were firmly established.

In other directions, too, the B.R.C.S. assisted the medical service. Seeing the need for hospitals at St. Nazaire, it very early in September began to move one of its hospitals from Paris. Then it organised rest-station parties, which soon relieved detachments of R.A.M.C. at Villeneuve, Paris, and other places, and continued for many weeks to attend British soldiers passing through on ambulance trains *en route* for the sea base. In this manner the B.R.C.S. gave valuable help at a critical period; but on a small scale compared with the assistance it was soon to provide in France and elsewhere. Its story has been told in the public press. Its happy amalgamation with the Order of St. John has been recorded. Only the soldier, on whatever front he be, knows to the full what a difference is made to life on active service by the work of the conjoint societies.

It is not without interest to turn to England before detailing the history of the medical units during the passage of the Rivers Morin and Marne, and to review the situation there also. The Sixth Division had sailed; the Seventh was in course of collection from South African and Mediterranean stations; while the Indian Divisions, the Cavalry, and the Meerut and Lahore Divisions were embarking, or were already *en route*. In addition there was a call for new armies. Men up and down the United Kingdom were rushing to enrol, and from every far-off spot where the Union Jack fluttered, or where British men lived, trains and boats were bearing volunteers "home" to enrol as soldiers.

Obviously this expansion of the British Expeditionary Force, or more rightly, this creation of new armies—"the first 100,000"—a mere handful compared with those who were to follow—would need an adequate medical service. Expansion of Dominion and Colonial Forces would be followed by a corresponding expansion of their particular medical units. But "the New" Army promised to run into many hundreds of thousands, and the necessary expansion of the Army Medical Service was likely to be of phenomenal and almost bewildering proportions. It was a situation demanding the utmost organising ability and experience of every officer of the medical service. Quite obviously the activities of the R.A.M.C. on the Western Front were soon to develop enormously, and that development must be watched and directed by some one possessed of the necessary qualifications, while the general situation at home and elsewhere demanded the whole attention of an officer of equal attainments. To repeat a previous statement, no happier choice for the Western Front could have been made than in the selection of Sir A. T. Sloggett. The record of the medical service in France, so often commented on in despatches in complimentary manner, is ample proof of the wisdom of the Army Council. Just as naturally, Sir A. Keogh, architect of the modern medical service of our armies, came back to the War Office from Paris, leaving the B.R.C.S. to other organisers. These two officers presently produced a medical service which, as before mentioned, differs in no way whatever from that in existence when the war opened. It is bigger—vastly bigger—that is all, while additions to its equipment and organisation have not in the least varied the truth of the above statement. Lest it should be thought that this expansion of the medical service, inevitably rapid, for the need was urgent, was of a haphazard or piecemeal description, it should be remarked that in no case was proper training of the rank and file of the R.A.M.C. hurried or neglected. The R.A.M.C. training depot at Aldershot, now removed elsewhere, was strengthened

and expanded, and other depots of similar pattern were opened and staffed. Here the non-commissioned ranks received thorough instruction in nursing and other duties. The training of medical officers was a far easier matter, for their main qualification for work with the R.A.M.C. is their medical and surgical training. Some experience at a R.A.M.C. depot, and work in the hospitals with the wounded, whereby more experience was gained, rapidly made of these civil surgeons efficient officers of the R.A.M.C.

Thus, units were found for succeeding divisions, and in similar manner further expansion of the R.A.M.C. has been effected. Before the cessation of hostilities it was a vast organisation which employed a majority of the medical profession of the country.

Expansion of the R.A.M.C. and the preparation of medical units to sail with succeeding divisions was not by any means the only work required of those responsible for the medical service in the United Kingdom. There was the question of the provision of hospital beds, for the ten general hospitals and the stationary hospitals sent to France were undoubtedly inadequate for the sick and wounded of an expeditionary force already increasing, and likely to increase rapidly. The subject of hospital organisation in England has already received some mention, but it is of such importance and of such dimensions that it will be deferred till later, as will mention of the medical boards set up throughout the country for recruiting purposes.

The tale of the Marne is therefore continued with a more detailed description of the doings of the units of the R.A.M.C. during the period 6th to 11th September, when fighting on the Aisne may be said to have set in in earnest.

## CHAPTER XII

Advance toward Grand Morin River—The three Corps and movements of their medical units—The 7th September—Crossing the Grand Morin River—Ambulance Trains and Clearing Hospitals.

VERY different scenes and conditions surrounded the divisions of the British Expeditionary Force as they marched at daybreak on Sunday, the 6th of September. Forest trees encompassed them in all directions, providing grateful shade. Long, dusty, cobbled roads were now replaced by vistas of cool green, and better than all, the men had slept and rested, and they were advancing. No longer were they retreating at break-neck speed, plodding on and on and on interminably, desperately weary and exhausted.

Early in the morning cavalry patrols were feeling their way forward toward the north-east, the cavalry brigades following, and with them in each case light ambulance wagons and sufficient personnel to deal with casualties. The heavier ambulance wagons and the bulk of each unit followed more leisurely. Here and there horse artillery opened upon scattered bodies of the enemy, the rearguards of Von Klück's army, and these replying sent shrapnel bursting over our cavalry. By evening the 1st and 2nd Cavalry Brigades were at Jouy-le-Chatelle. In the course of the day the latter had lost 4 killed and had had 3 officers and 14 men wounded. In all, with four missing, it had suffered losses amounting to twenty-five. The 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades reached the neighbourhood of Touquin, Pezarches, and Paradis, and the 4th Le Corbier; the latter having hardly come in touch with the enemy. In no case had

there been anything in the nature of close fighting, merely skirmishes, and for the most part long-range artillery action. (See Map VIII.)

Marching with the baggage columns of the various brigades the cavalry field ambulances had an easy day compared with many of those they had spent near Mons, and in their retreat from it. How disorganising was that retreat is perhaps illustrated by the fact that it was not until the early hours of this morning that the two halves into which the cavalry field ambulance column had been broken on the night of 25th August, contrived to break asunder again into four component units, and the personnel and equipment of those separate units to rendezvous behind the cavalry brigades with which they were to march. Following the road from Mormant, the 1st Cavalry Field Ambulance reached Gastins, where there had been a small cavalry affair, and picking up the wounded went on to Jouy-le-Chatelle. The 2nd followed the 3rd Cavalry Brigade by way of Marles, a little to the north of Mormant, where touch was obtained with Uhlans. The brigade here suffered slight loss, and the cavalry field ambulance promptly attended the wounded, carrying them on to Chaumes, due south of Marles, for the latter was too exposed a position. Late in the afternoon the ambulance struck north-east through Vilbert and rejoined the 3rd Cavalry Brigade at Pezarches a little after nightfall. Throughout the day Lieutenant Littlejohn, of whom there has been frequent mention in the records of this cavalry field ambulance, had followed the brigade closely, keeping in touch with it and contriving to have two light ambulance wagons with him. At night the few wounded which had been collected were placed on an empty supply wagon and sent southward. Of the remaining three cavalry field ambulances there is no important mention.

The three Corps of the British Expeditionary Force were echeloned along the line Lagny—La Chapelle Iger, the First on the right, in touch with Conneau's

Cavalry, the Second in the centre, and the Third on the left, its left flank in touch with the right of the Sixth French Army now pushing due east towards the river Ourcq.

The First Corps was not long in coming into action. Its two divisions marched from their bivouacs in the direction of Rozoy, toward which German infantry were also moving. Here the 1st Brigade was somewhat heavily engaged quite early in the morning. In the early afternoon the corps moved on again to the line Vaudoy—Ormeaux, and halting for a while gained the line Pezarches—Touquin—Le Plessis—Vaudoy, its left swung round to the east, and the whole corps now facing in a north-easterly direction.

For the R.A.M.C. it was a peculiarly happy day, such as they had often practised at Aldershot or on the plains at Salisbury. The horsed ambulance wagons might be slow, but they could keep in touch with troops fighting an action of this description, where comparatively long halts were made, and where progress to the north-east was not of a rapid nature. It allowed the bearer divisions of the field ambulances, trudging along with some of the ambulance wagons, to push up into the firing-line and collect the wounded, and gave them time to dress and feed them before the divisions moved forward. By then the tent divisions were in touch, and the wounded were transferred promptly, allowing the bearers to move on again unimpeded.

Rozoy is but a short march from the line occupied by the First Corps on the early morning of the 6th of September, and Pompierre, where the tent division of the 1st Field Ambulance opened a dressing station in a farm, is scarcely two miles from it. The farm was indeed a happy choice, being within easy reach of the bearers. Here numbers of wounded, including a Uhlan officer, were collected, and were cleared to the south in motor lorries, and in the case of the most gravely injured in ambulance wagons. It was not till nightfall that the tent division could move on after the bearer division,

bivouacking at night at Raperie, close to Vaudoy. It had been a busy day, a day during which the personnel of the unit had been able to achieve results, to give every attention to its charges, and to dress and feed them to their own complete satisfaction. Perhaps that was the reason for the cheeriness of the men, upon which the officer commanding remarks. Or perhaps it was elation at the turn in events and at the knowledge that they, so recently the pursued, were now hot foot after the Germans.

Nos. 2 and 3 Field Ambulances followed the First Division, the 2nd halting for the night at Pompierre, and the 3rd reaching Vaudoy. In each case the bearer division had been up with the troops, and in the case of the 3rd Field Ambulance the tent division had done useful work in an improvised dressing station at Paradis Farm, *en route* to Vaudoy.

Field ambulances with the Second Division do not appear to have been harder worked than those of the First Division, though the 5th gave considerable assistance at Chaumes, where it prepared for wounded. Here the bearers brought wounded of the 3rd Infantry Brigade picked up near Lumigny, forty-eight of these being later transported to the railway at Verneuil and sent off by train toward Paris. That night the unit reached Le Mee, a mile north of Rozoy, the 6th Field Ambulance being with it. The remnants of the 4th Field Ambulance were also present.

The march of the Second Corps on the 6th September was a comparatively uneventful affair, for contact was hardly obtained with the enemy. At night the Third Division, which was immediately on the left of the First Corps, bivouacked on the line Faremoutieres—Lumigny, facing in a due easterly direction; while the Fifth had its left swung back, the troops occupying the line La Celle, immediately adjacent to Faremoutieres, Courtry, and so westward to Le Plessis. They were on the heights overlooking the narrow valley of the Grand Morin River, and already their outposts had crossed

the stream and were in the wedge of country between it and the Marne and Petit Morin Rivers.

"Spirits of troops rising enormously at the change and at the news of the German retirement," writes an officer marching with the Corps, in his official diary.

There were other reasons why the spirits of the troops should rise, for the country in which they were now campaigning was entirely different from those northern parts across which they had toiled under a grilling sun in the last days of August. Behind them now was a beautiful forest—that of Crécy—through which the columns had marched, with a cool breeze fanning the cheeks of the men, the leaves above sheltering them from the sun's rays. They might indeed have been on peace manœuvres, for though guns could be heard to the south, where the First Corps was in action, and also to the east, where cavalry were in contact with the enemy, here, in this area, all was peace and quietness. Roads cut in straight lines divided the forest into triangles, creating long vistas of green, across which deer occasionally galloped. Now and again open spaces were reached, where farms were come upon, with aged peasants about them and cattle grazing in the meadows. But one significant fact was to be observed: "Not for sixty miles round," as an officer of one of the field ambulances remarks, "was there a Frenchman to be come upon under seventy years of age, and even of them there were not so many." The remainder were with the army or had fled to Paris.

From Faremoutieres, La Celle, and Courtry, the men of the field ambulances when they bivouacked that night, could peer down upon the Grand Morin, and beyond, and see the smoke from the bivouacs where German rearguards rested. During the day they had caught glimpses now and again, as they emerged from the forest, of roads to the north of the river grey with retreating Germans and white with clouds of dust hanging over them; seeing it the men chuckled.

"We had been doing the same in August and the first three days of September," one of the R.A.M.C. reminds us. "We had been trekking along hard, dry, dusty roads as fast as our legs could take us, with Germans spurring us on and ready to pounce upon us. It was good to turn the tables. To pursue the enemy was a change which heartened us up wonderfully."

Certainly that march on the 6th September heartened officers and men throughout the Third and Fifth Divisions and caused the personnel of the field ambulances to march on in the highest spirits.

The day having proved uneventful for the Second Corps as a whole, it is only natural that the field ambulances with its divisions should provide no events worth mentioning particularly, except perhaps the 7th Field Ambulance which had been divided during the retreat. It was still divided. Its bearer division under Major Fielding had marched every step of the long, tiring road from Mons to Meaux and so across the Marne River to Faremoutieres. Here it busied itself with the collection of wounded, for some casualties had been inflicted upon the corps as our outposts drove the German rearguards back from the north bank of the Grand Morin River and crossed it. Here, too, it was joined by that party of the tent division under Major Maurice which had remained at Compiègne station to treat the wounded. At Villeneuve, the remnants of the tent division, with Colonel Kennedy, were joined by R.A.M.C. reinforcements of 12 officers and nearly 300 rank and file. These were divided into three parties so as to provide reinforcements for other divisions, and in this way 3 officers and 100 men were sent to the First Corps, 5 officers and 150 men to the Second, and 4 officers and 50 men to the Third.

It will be seen, therefore, that the D.M.S. had been very prompt to fill the gaps left after Mons and Maroilles, Landrecies and Le Cateau, and had at the very first moment sent reinforcements to make good the losses the R.A.M.C. had suffered.

The night of the 6th of September found the 8th

Field Ambulance domiciled in one of the most luxurious billets it had as yet encountered. As the tent division marched behind the bearers through the Forest of Crécy it came to Haute-Feuille, just on the edge of the forest and between it and that of Malvoisine, which is almost continuous, and there took possession of a hunting box, furnished in most comfortable manner, which looked cheery enough that chilly night as flames licked round the logs in the fireplace of the salon and roared up the chimney. Officers and men enjoyed a hearty meal, and perhaps more than all a peaceful smoke, conscious that now there was no fear of a sudden alarm and a hurried move, no fear for the moment of a repetition of that seemingly endless retreat which had proved such a nightmare to the majority of them.

The 9th Field Ambulance picked up some wounded from our cavalry brigades, and marched into Lumigny as night was falling.

"Troops as well as officers showed their pleasure at the orders for an advance, and started the march singing and whistling," writes one of the officers.

All three field ambulances bivouacked in their divisional areas.

Like the Second, the Third Corps on its left, between it and the right of the Sixth French Army, saw no fighting on this, the first day of the Marne operations. It marched north-east towards Villeneuve-le-Comte and bivouacked in the area around that village, having, like the troops on the right, traversed a thickly wooded forest country. But in spite of that, men fell out in numbers, for no doubt they had not yet recuperated from the exhaustion of those long forced marches towards Paris. However, a good night's sleep did wonders for them, and the whole British Expeditionary Force faced the 7th September with spirits as high as ever.

Monday, the 7th September, another fine day and as warm as the previous one, favoured operations and assisted not a little in the rapid advance which the British

Expeditionary Force continued to make. Very early in the day cavalry, with their accustomed dash, were in touch and engaged with the enemy, the 2nd Cavalry Brigade being chiefly concerned. In fact, in the neighbourhood of Moncel there was quite a lively little affair. At this period the Eighth French Cavalry Division was in touch with our troopers, and some of the latter were dismounted close to the little village mentioned. At that moment two squadrons of the German Guard Dragoons attacked them, whereupon two troops only of the 9th Lancers went full tilt for the enemy, burst a path right through them, and then galloped beyond the village. The 18th Hussars now joined in the action, bringing effective fire to bear from the west. Whilst doing so one of its squadrons sent its horses to the rear and fought dismounted, being caught a little while later in the open by a force of Uhlans, which, seeing them, spurred their horses into a gallop and charged them furiously. But the Hussars stood as steady as rocks, beat off the attack, and killed or wounded no fewer than fifty Uhlans. No. 4 Cavalry Field Ambulance, following hard on the heels of the cavalry, was promptly on the scene and dealt with a number of the casualties. Twenty-one of these it was able to send to the rear at once. The remainder awaited the arrival of the heavier portion of the unit.

Other cavalry field ambulances passed a comparatively uneventful day, for even heavy shelling was coming to be regarded as nothing remarkable. Still the officer commanding No. 2 Cavalry Field Ambulance must have been sufficiently impressed by the affair to record the fact that his ambulance came under heavy shell-fire near Chailly, and was lucky to escape without casualties. A fellow unit sets down an incident which gives some idea of the suffering of French civilians. For the most part people had fled to Paris. Here and there they had remained at their farms, and like the unit above mentioned had come under shell-fire. Near one of the numerous farms was a poor old fellow of seventy-two, whose head

had been almost torn off by a shell burst. Yet he was alive, a human wreck, one of thousands of hapless peasants to suffer by the war. There had been others at Maroilles and in the little hamlets near Le Cateau, the accidental casualties resulting from enemy invasion. There were more in the sweep of country between Mons and the Grand Morin. Also there were those very many unfortunates who suffered because of deliberately brutal acts on the part of the Germans—thousands of them in Belgium alone, not to mention those in France. An example of this brutality was discovered by one of the ambulances a day or so later.

"Passed two murdered civilians *en route*," says the report.

At night the 1st Cavalry Brigade was at La Bochetière, a little south and east of Choisy, which is some three miles from Jouy-sur-Morin, upon the Grand Morin River; the 2nd being at Feraubry to the east of Choisy and a little south of west of La Ferte-Gaucher. The 4th Cavalry Brigade was in the same area at Le Carronge just east of Choisy, while the 3rd and the 5th were well over the Grand Morin and were close to or actually in Villeneuve, Vinot, and Rebais itself. They had swept quite a considerable portion of the country clear of the enemy, and had now gained the narrow strip of hill and dale and orchard country separating them from the Petit Morin.

The march of the Second Corps took them without incident to or across the same river, the 2nd Brigade of the First Division being at Jouy-sur-Morin, the Second Division in the neighbourhood of St. Simeon, with one brigade at La Vanne, north of the river. The Third Division on its left was at Le Corvelles, Le Bretonniers, and Le Martroy on the southern bank of the Grand Morin, while the Fifth Division was right across at Boissy-le-Chatelle. The Third Corps bivouacked at night on the line Maisoncelles — Giremoutiers, its advanced posts at Pierre Levée and Le Gros Chêne, not so far from the south bank of the Marne River.

So far as these corps were concerned the day had been almost without incident, though the 12th Infantry Brigade had had a brush with Uhlans late in the evening near La Grande Rue. Thus the whole British Expeditionary Force had reached, or had crossed, the first river obstacle on its northerly march, and was well on towards the Marne River.

Field ambulances with the First and Second Corps engaged in little active work, though some of them saw plenty of German dead about, and busied themselves in giving them burial. The bearer division of the 7th Field Ambulance in particular, which had been collecting wounded on the previous night, moved on to Le Martroy, collecting more British and Germans as it went, and burying the dead.

"Much booty by the wayside," remarks the officer who commanded this party.

"Passed several camps which had recently been occupied by Germans," writes another officer. "The road was strewn with empty bottles, and the villages through which we passed had been pillaged."

So the German was already leaving his mark on the country. Elsewhere other officers refer on frequent occasions to the pillaging of houses, particularly the cellars, and to finding the latter and the roads near every village littered with bottles, all of them empty.

At Coulommiers there were abundant signs of enemy occupation, and in the houses there were numerous German wounded who needed attention. The Third Corps wounded, the few of them that there were, were dealt with by the 12th Field Ambulance, who brought twenty-one wounded into Maisoncelles, the majority of these suffering from shrapnel wounds.

Meanwhile as yet ambulance trains were, with few exceptions, hardly in touch with the British Expeditionary Force, for the change of base had taken them down to Nantes and St. Nazaire, which was a good sixty hours' journey from the front where our troops were operating.

The exception was a Franco-British train, jocularly

termed the *Entente Cordiale*. This was originally a purely French unit, but the shortage of rolling stock being such as to preclude the supply of trucks or coaches to detachments of Nos. 4 and 5 British Ambulance Trains, now at Rouen, Major G. A. Moore, in command of the detachments, contrived, nevertheless, to make use of their services. A little discussion, some pleading and persuasion, and his forty-five men joined the twenty-five Frenchmen of the service sanitaire, forming a single ambulance train unit. This ambulance train left Rouen on the 31st August and ran to Creil. On the 6th September it was at Verneuil l'Étang, fifteen miles only from the British Expeditionary Force, whence it ran to Coulommiers and thence to St. Nazaire, carrying 230 British and German wounded. These were at once placed in the cots aboard the hospital ship *Asturias*, and so evacuated to England.

On the 7th No. 4 Ambulance Train was at Coulommiers, Nos. 3 and 2 following it within a few hours, and clearing numerous wounded from Chaumes, Marles, and Coulommiers. More than 100 wounded were brought from St. Simeon, on the banks of the Grand Morin, fifteen kilomètres from Coulommiers, thanks to the initiative of Major A. H. Waring, in command of the train, who divided his trucks and sent half the number up to St. Simeon with a detachment of the R.A.M.C., the remainder meanwhile loading wounded transferred to them from No. 1 Clearing Hospital, then hard at work on the station.

No medical units worked harder in those early days of the war than did the ambulance train units. Wretchedly equipped at first as to rolling stock, British initiative soon transformed the *fourgons de marchandise*. Ventilators were cut, light admitted, stoves fitted, and the difficulty of carrying a supply of water overcome. The greatest handicap was undoubtedly the lack of easy intercommunication. This was rectified in a very little while by the provision of corridor coaches, but in the latter days of August and during September many an

R.A.M.C. officer and man risked his life, clambering along the footboards while ambulance trains were in motion. Indeed, on two occasions the officers commanding ambulance trains were injured, one receiving a heavy blow, as he crawled from *fourgon* to *fourgon*, from some object which the train was passing. The Commander-in-Chief recognised the valuable services of these units by specially mentioning in his earliest despatches the names of the officers who commanded.

Casualty clearing stations were moving up to take their part in the work of dealing with casualties; the first, in command of Major F. A. Symons, a most efficient and energetic officer who was unfortunately killed in 1917, and whose loss to the medical service is practically irreparable, was split into at least two parties, which were posted at Villeneuve Triage and Lieusant. Here wounded from ambulance trains, or those sent in to await the arrival of ambulance trains, were treated.

A few hours later the clearing hospital handed over these stations to relief parties and pushed east to Chaumes, Marles, and Tournan, and finally to Coulommiers, where Major A. L. Webb had already opened a dressing station. This officer's sanitary squads were employed at all railheads on their sanitary duties. But there had been already many occasions when they could and did give actual assistance to the wounded. They worked on railway stations and in goods yards, and finally here they were at Coulommiers, with such material as they had been able to secure, giving first aid to our wounded and feeding them till the arrival of the hospital unit.

Only a brief account of the activities of the sanitary squads is possible. Yet the work they did was of vital importance, and thanks to their timely presence, many a wounded British soldier received attention before the advance party of the clearing hospital could arrive. Coulommiers provides a happy instance. Wounded were already on the platform when Major Webb arrived upon the scene, where all was confusion. Strenuous work reduced chaos to order, tidied up the waiting-

rooms, and made presentable wards of them, and secured also fifty-two mattresses for the worst of the cases. Then came an ambulance train which removed the wounded, though others continued to filter into the railway station.

St. Simeon, some five miles due west, was the next rendezvous of a portion of this party, consisting of Major Webb, one sergeant, and an orderly. They embarked on a motor car and, taking dressings with them, reached the railway station. The place is within easy distance of Rebais, from whence lorries soon rolled in with wounded. There were sixty lying on the platform when evening fell. A further sixty came, in the small hours of the 11th, shortly after an ambulance train had cleared the others. More followed, and by evening approximately 300 had come in, had been dressed where necessary, and fed, and had been despatched to the base on an ambulance train urgently summoned. It was not till the 12th that the remainder of the squad came upon the scene, a timely arrival, for the two who had preceded them were exhausted. Yet there was no rest, for wounded trickled in continuously, or came along in big batches, till once more large numbers had been dealt with, fed and dressed, and passed back along the railway, while some sixty lying at Jouy were evacuated by a party told off for the purpose.

None of this work was that for which sanitary squads were specially detailed to the British Expeditionary Force. Their duties related in particular to the securing of pure water supplies and the sanitation of railheads and troop areas. But the great retreat and this rapid advance over the country of the Marne had upset the closest calculations. They had caused French and British units to become mixed. They had called for strenuous work by every man capable of carrying a rifle. In the case of the R.A.M.C. every officer and man fell upon the task which was most obviously pressing, and no one can doubt that the instant care of wounded men stranded and waiting on railway stations to which motor convoys

had brought them was of prime importance; the ubiquitous sanitary squads made the most of many similar opportunities, and may be fairly allowed to have rendered vital assistance.

No. 1 Clearing Hospital got through an enormous amount of work at Coulommiers. Taking possession of the waiting-rooms at the railway station, Major Symons speedily converted them into dressing and operating rooms and into wards. Meanwhile he had sent out small detachments on motor supply lorries, so that when the latter returned with wounded there was skilled attention for them. Hundreds of wounded, British and German, reached the railway station in this manner, and were instantly fed and dressed. By then the long-expected ambulance trains arrived, and thereafter evacuation went on steadily and swiftly.

The 2nd Clearing Hospital was meanwhile at Angers, where it gave great assistance to the French. It then entrained and followed the British Expeditionary Force up to the Aisne area. The 3rd was at Le Mans, where it worked day and night at high pressure. In the ordinary sense of the word it had not "opened" as a clearing hospital, but was acting as a rest party at the railway station. But its duties comprised not only the feeding of the hundreds of sick and wounded which ambulance trains and improvised ambulance trains brought down, but the re-dressing of a majority of them, and the transfer of numbers to No. 5 Stationary Hospital then open in the town. Two items are in particular extracted from the official record of the unit. A spy discovered in the neighbourhood endeavoured to escape, and was shot down by French soldiers. As showing that the Frenchman did not do things by halves, this spy came into the hands of the clearing hospital with no fewer than five wounds. The second incident relates to the use of motor lorries for evacuation. There was in those early days no provision for ambulance transport for clearing hospitals and base hospitals. A General Officer arriving by ambulance train had therefore to be

sent to the stationary hospital on a motor lorry, and promptly denounced the system. His was a wound of the leg, and from personal experience he was able to judge of the discomfort of such a vehicle. His voice, added to the urgent demands already made on England for motor ambulances, was within a few hours productive of results, for two reached Le Mans and were at once put into service.

The 4th and 5th Clearing Hospitals were at this stage of the Marne operations *en route* by sea or rail. The 6th also was on the railway, having orders to supply R.A.M.C. reinforcements to the Third Corps.

Enemy resistance was now getting stronger. The north bank of the Petit Morin and the Marne offered numerous defensive positions, so that the 8th and 9th September were marked by some stiff fighting with German rearguards. On the 9th, too, General Foch's reserve army got to grips with the German invader, inflicting very heavy losses upon the enemy. That, and the pressure of the Sixth French Army, pushing east across the Ourcq, sent Von Klück and Von Buelow north at speed, so that the advance of the British Expeditionary Force, hitherto almost leisurely, became far more rapid as the pursuit was pressed and the invaders were flung farther out of the Marne country.

# CHAPTER XIII

Crossing of the Petit Morin—Medical arrangements of 8th September—The 9th September—Various engagements—Work of the R.A.M.C.—The 10th September—The Field Ambulances at Hautevesnes—End of the Marne operations—The British Expeditionary Force reaches the Aisne area—Review of the medical situation.

British cavalry regiments were early afield on Tuesday, the 8th September, spurring towards the Petit Morin, with troopers of a French cavalry division on their right. Presently, under a lowering sky, they drove in enemy rearguards and sent them scuttling across the river. At Sablonnières, east-north-east of Rebais, there was sharp fighting, in which the 1st and 4th Cavalry Brigades, assisted by the Black Watch and 1st Camerons, pushed the enemy out of the town and the woods surrounding it, and drove him into open country. In this action the cavalry losses were 2 officers killed, 3 wounded, and 20 other ranks killed and wounded. Immediately on its left the 2nd Cavalry Brigade forced a crossing at La Forge and pushed on to La Basseville, losing nine killed and wounded. Farther west the 3rd Cavalry Brigade met with stiff opposition near St. Cyr, and failed to make good the crossing of the river, while the 5th, approaching the Petit Morin between Orly and St. Ouen, a little to the east, was held up all day.

This check to the advance of the cavalry was soon rectified by the arrival of the infantry. In fact, except for the First Corps and the cavalry in front of it in the eastern field of operations, the advance of the British Expeditionary Force called for the deployment of infantry and artillery before the Petit Morin was finally crossed.

In front of the First Corps the cavalry, meeting with less opposition once Sablonnières was seized, pressed on in advance of the infantry, and by evening had seized the bridge at Charly-sur-Marne, a straggling stone-built village on the north bank, where, as in other places, enemy rearguards had failed to destroy the bridge across the river. Charly itself was, however, not in British hands until the 9th September. British infantry and artillery during the 8th did magnificent work, and gave great support to our cavalry brigades.

The First Division cleared Sablonnières and reached Hondevillers and Basseville well on the road to the Marne. The Second Division met opposition on the north bank of the Petit Morin, but forced a crossing, nevertheless, at Le Gravière and La Forge. It was then in action at Boitron, a mile to the north, where a machine-gun company of the enemy blundered into one of its brigades. The 4th Guards Brigade handled the situation in splendid manner, broke the enemy, and took 100 prisoners and a battery of six machine-guns. By nightfall the division was at Fontaine d'Am, only a mile from the Marne. It had lost 14 killed, 8 officers and 102 other ranks wounded, and 53 missing.

The divisions of the Second Corps saw considerable fighting, for they were held up on the southern bank of the Petit Morin. A battalion of the Garde Schützen and a company of Jaegers were well entrenched south of Busseroles, a little place on the northern bank between St. Ouen and Orly, and held on obstinately. But the Third Division was not to be denied. The men who had held on at Mons, who had fought the Germans to a standstill at Le Cateau, though they themselves were rocking with fatigue and loss of sleep, were not likely to be denied now that they were at the top of their form, well fed, well rested, burning to pay back something of what they owed. They swept the enemy out of his position, punishing him severely, and capturing men and machine-guns. It was an exultant division which bivouacked that night in the neighbourhood of Bussières.

On their left the Fifth Division also met opposition from well-posted enemy rearguards. But the men of this division likewise knew the German now, and sweeping him from St. Cyr and St. Ouen, crossed the bridges which he had accommodatingly left, and rested at night at Noisement and neighbouring villages. The Marne was but a mile away, and German columns were now scuttling across it in a northerly direction faster than the weary columns of the retreating British Expeditionary Force had crossed on their southern journey.

Lastly, the Fourth Division and the 19th Infantry Brigade, west of the point where the Petit Morin joins the Marne, swept direct on that river, and though engaged with the enemy at fairly long range and in closer action with him at La Ferte-sous-Jouarre, they pushed on steadily, and that night bivouacked on the southern bank of the Marne, the destruction of the bridges by the rearguards of the Germans alone preventing their crossing.

Reviewed as a whole, the 8th September had seen a series of stiff engagements, none of them, however, of large proportions, though the net result of the day's fighting was by no means unimportant. It had seen, too, the Petit Morin crossed, at least one bridge over the Marne seized, and the way cleared for the morrow. Though rain now poured in torrents on our bivouacs, there was no damping the ardour of the men of our fighting divisions.

So many small sharp actions naturally enough involved British casualties, and therefore a rather busy day for the field ambulances marching with the British Expeditionary Force. But, as one would expect, for those medical units on the eastern flank of our pursuing force the day was comparatively uneventful. No. 1 Field Ambulance, however, saw a considerable amount of fighting, and was under fire on numerous occasions. As the First Division approached the Petit Morin it came under heavy shrapnel fire and suffered casualties, the R.A.M.C. suffering also, for Captain T. Scatchard,

attached 24th Brigade, Royal Field Artillery, was killed, and Captain G. R. Painton, attached 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards, was wounded. The latter was picked up by the 3rd Cavalry Field Ambulance, which unit collected altogether two officers and fourteen other ranks British. At Sablonnières the Black Watch and Cameron Highlanders had some forty to fifty wounded, which the bearer division of the 1st Field Ambulance carried to the Mairie. Here four officers and twenty-nine other ranks British, including some of the 4th Dragoon Guards, and twenty-four Germans were treated, and subsequently evacuated. The tent division of this unit had meanwhile remained at Choisy, south of the Grand Morin, the tent divisions of Nos. 2 and 3 being near it. Just to the east of the 1st Field Ambulance was the 4th Cavalry Field Ambulance, which collected sixteen wounded during its march to Bellot, on the south bank of the Petit Morin.

Field Ambulances of the Second Division were rather busier. They had handed their sick and wounded over to the Railway Transport Officer at St. Simeon on the Grand Morin, and marched to La Tretoire, near La Forge, where the division forced the Petit Morin. Crossing with it, the bearer divisions were soon engaged in collecting wounded near Boitron, finding numbers of Germans amongst them, for there had been sharp fighting with the Jaegers of the German Guard, who suffered severely at the hands of our dashing infantry. A complete machine-gun company was captured and placed to the credit of the Second Division. Rain poured on the men of the R.A.M.C. as they laboured, and altogether conditions were far from happy.

Just west of these medical units, those of the Second Corps and of the cavalry brigades operating behind Orly, St. Ouen, and St. Cyr, were busier by far, for it was here that enemy rearguards put up more effective opposition, more effective because Second Corps troops were tired after days of continuous effort, and in great degree no doubt because the corps lacked that com-

paratively generous artillery support enjoyed by their comrades of the First Corps, for not yet had their losses at Le Cateau — some thirty guns — been made good. Thus enemy effort was more successful, and casualties resulted.

Immediately north of Doué the 2nd Cavalry Field Ambulance opened a dressing station at a little farm called Villers, where twenty-eight wounded were treated and subsequently handed to the tent division, an arrangement which allowed bearers and light ambulance wagons to push on over the river.

The 5th Cavalry Field Ambulance was at Gibraltar, a place-name peculiarly familiar to British ears. This Gibraltar is a tiny hamlet a mile south of Orly, and no doubt peaceful enough before this. Now it was under gun-fire, and the bearers of the cavalry field ambulance likewise. Nevertheless they picked up wounded, one of their stretchers being broken by flying shrapnel as they did so, and the wounded man again injured. Then they retired across orchards and meadows to a fold amongst the hills, at Le Jardin, which gave them protection.

Close to Gibraltar was also the bearer subdivision of the 8th Field Ambulance, separated from the remainder of the unit. Its dressing station was thronged with wounded, and when its heavier section arrived at nightfall it had a hundred to hand over to them. Imagine for a moment the scene at that dressing station. A little schoolhouse on the outskirts of Boisbaudry, with frightened yet inquisitive children outside endeavouring to peer into it, while shrapnel burst on the far bank of the river. Here two of the officers of the field ambulance were hard at work, their coats off and sleeves rolled up.

> D—— and I were hard at it, with our coats off, and were covered in blood to the elbows, when General Smith-Dorrien came in. The Corps Commander said, "You get on with your work and don't take any notice of me." Then he went round the schoolroom, talking to the wounded, and left after a few minutes.

It was only a fleeting view that officers and patients gained of him, but it cheered the latter wonderfully. It helped not a little to be able to talk to the General, to tell him exactly how and where the wound was received, for an old soldier such as he could fully understand, and his sympathy was apparent.

Wounded continued to arrive at the schoolhouse, and for long hours the two officers laboured. Then the heavier portion of the unit arrived and gave them much-needed relief. They cleaned themselves and went for a stroll, which brought them to a cabaret called the "Gibraltar," which caused them to marvel. Then they had their first view of German prisoners in numbers, for a gang of them, fresh from fighting across the river, were marched through Boisbaudry. That night thirteen empty motor lorries, already requisitioned for the evacuation of wounded, came to the schoolhouse, and in them, cushioned on straw, were laid all who were fit to travel.

The remaining two field ambulances followed the division closely from Gibraltar to Orly and Bussières, and were *en route* all night, picking up wounded here and there as they came upon them.

Farther west field ambulances of the Fifth Division also engaged in the operations south of St. Ouen and St. Cyr. Considerable skirmishing and fighting took place in the neighbourhood, and because of its convenient position, Doué became the centre where all wounded of the Fifth Division were collected. One field ambulance pushed on with the fighting troops :

> "Advance guard in action," says the commanding officer. "Germans retired, and we followed them through St. Cyr and bivouacked at cross roads at Montepeine."

They were now half-way to Saacy on the River Marne, bivouacking on the strip of land which separates the former and the Petit Morin. On the way they had picked up numbers of wounded and carried them on in their ambulance wagons.

Another field ambulance followed close behind, and crossing the Petit Morin reached Rougeville on the southern heights looking down on a deep loop of the Marne, from which they could see Saacy, Mery, Nanteuil, Citry, and many another village close beside the water. On the heights due north of them German troops were deeply entrenched, and there on the morrow British troops were to attack them with greater *élan* than ever before, if that were possible, and were so to break down their resistance that from the 10th onward, so far as the British Expeditionary Force was concerned, there was little fighting. The ambulance in question picked up numbers of wounded during the day, and buried an officer of the East Surrey Regiment who died of wounds when in its charge, and also a British soldier found lying beside the road.

The last of the three divisional field ambulances had meanwhile left a tent subdivision at Doué, to which all the divisional sick were at once transferred, thus clearing the ambulance. The remainder of the unit pushed on to St. Cyr, and that night joined up with the 13th Field Ambulance at Montepeine. The bearers searching the ground thereabouts picked up wounded, and discovered seven British and five Germans lying in the same house, probably placed there by one of our regimental medical officers. Elsewhere four German wounded were found belonging to the Garde Schützen Battalion. Just about here the ambulance buried by the roadside a trooper of the 5th Lancers who had been picked up at St. Cyr, and doubtless his tomb is marked by our French allies and stands there to-day, silent witness of the fighting of 1914.

Third Corps medical units need no description seeing that the corps was not heavily engaged, though skirmishing at Signy Signets resulted in some forty wounded. These the ambulances were easily able to deal with, and evacuated them that night by motor transport.

Wednesday, the 9th September, so far as the French were concerned, was the most critical day of the Marne,

and certainly it may be described as the most critical for the Germans. For the Sixth French Army on its right flank had, as indicated, driven in its cavalry and infantry screens long ago, and by dint of stubborn fighting had forced its way to the banks of the Ourcq. Not until the French authorities have released material for a narrative will it be fully appreciated of what a strenuous nature was the fighting in that neighbourhood, nor at what a cost the French gained their way towards the river. A journey through the country of the Marne and the Ourcq, now that hostilities are ended, provided a vision here and there of tumbled houses and of broken roofs, particularly east of Château-Thierry, but hamlets and villages and towns, speaking generally, had escaped the wreckage inflicted elsewhere, and the evidence of the hand of the Vandal, so conspicuous in Flanders, in Belgium, and in the Somme area, seemed to be missing from this smiling country, so much like England in many parts, and its picturesque stone-built residences. Kindly Nature had obliterated the work of artillery in September 1914, and the banks of the Marne, and the placid, meandering Petit Morin, the orchards and the pastures, the hills and valleys dotted with their farms and the humble dwellings of French folk might never have been disturbed. Yet graves dot the country : British and French and German. On the banks of the Ourcq they are to be found in profusion, while to the east of that river, along the Marne and from the Marne north to the Aisne, the country is sown thick with Germans. If France suffered for her terrific and fateful push towards the Ourcq, German divisions of Von Klück suffered even more severely. If the gallant men of the British Expeditionary Force marching so blithely across the Morin rivers towards the Marne and across the latter to the Aisne left some of their officers and men beneath French soil, they caused many a German to die for the defence of the country which they had invaded. As to the Ninth French Army and the other armies which our Ally had stretched away to Verdun they

dealt on the 9th September a stroke which was positively dramatic in the results it achieved.

Those results would not have been secured without the help of the Sixth French Army echeloned along the river Ourcq. The whole position indeed requires close scrutiny, and without the fullest information it is impossible to properly and fairly allocate to each one of the forces engaged its precise value in the whole achievement. It may, however, be said that the success of these Marne operations was due to combined and co-ordinated movement and action on the part of Manoury's Sixth French Army, that of the British Expeditionary Force operating directly south and east of the Sixth Army, and on the part of the remaining French armies on our right, and more particularly to the fighting prowess of the Ninth French Army capably directed by Foch. Miscalculation on the part of Von Klück assisted not a little, for whereas he swiftly recognised the danger Manoury's Sixth Army offered to his right flank, and took instant and adequate steps to counter it, he fell into the fatal error of discounting the danger to be expected from the British Expeditionary Force, the British Expeditionary Force which had crossed the Marne near Meaux less than a week before, disorganised to some—to him unknown and therefore exaggerated—extent, minus certain of its officers and men, weakened by losses in artillery and stores, and, so far as German Intelligence went, a force to be no longer so seriously considered. Von Klück made the fatal error of miscalculating the fighting strength of the British Expeditionary Force—the force which won on that and other fields a fame which will never grow dim—and opposed to it troops who were incapable of arresting its advance. He, in fact, depleted his southern front to meet Manoury's powerful and dangerous thrust, an opportunity of which Lord French made the utmost. In this he was largely assisted by strong attacks made by the French armies stretching from our immediate right as far as Verdun.

Not yet had Foch launched his Ninth Army across

the marshes of St. Gond. Not yet had Joffre's famous order of the day been issued. The cross which to-day looks down from the summit of the wooded heights overlooking the marshes of St. Gond did not then exist, for Foch had not issued his orders, and the spot had not yet become so famous that it must be marked and become sacred for all time. Manoury's Sixth French Army, fighting like heroes along the Ourcq, those most gallant "Contemptibles," as the Kaiser some two months later dared arrogantly to dub the British force which had set a check to his progress—men from Devon and Kent and Cornwall and every county, from Scotland, Wales, and Ireland—these two combined forces had exerted such pressure upon Von Klück that he was already withdrawing. The order to retreat had been issued, for continued and rapid advance on the part of the British Expeditionary Force would take it to within dangerous distance of Von Klück's communications. Then it was that Foch delivered a masterly stroke, driving a hammer-like blow at the left of Von Buelow's army. Its right had already been attacked and a wedge thrust in between it and the thinning left of Von Klück's army by other French troops, so that Von Buelow was now in serious difficulties also. The whole right of the invading force was threatened, and Von Klück's retreat was followed by that of Von Buelow. Promptly the pressure of the Allies increased, so that all that was German had to go, and a hitherto steady retirement became in some parts almost a *sauve qui peut.* German divisions raced for the Aisne, with the knowledge that nothing that could stop French and British lay between them and that river.

Thus it fell out that the British Expeditionary Force, so far as its cavalry and First and Second Corps were concerned, swept over the Marne or approached quite close to it without meeting opposition ; the Third Corps, however, saw fighting in the streets of La Ferte-sous-Jouarre, where the Germans strenuously resisted our progress. Almost everywhere, however, they abandoned

bridges; in one case at least it would seem because their men had been paying more attention to the cellars of the citizens of France than to their duty.

"We continued on very early and crossed the Marne at Nanteuil," writes one of the R.A.M.C. officers. "Here we saw enormous quantities of empty wine bottles—the results of German occupation. The bridge over the Marne at this town was intact, and we heard that the party of German miners told off to do the job, becoming intoxicated, had failed to carry out their mission. The result was that when the German rearguard withdrew across the river the bridge could not be destroyed, and the Third Division, which had expected to be obliged to build pontoon bridges, was relieved of this necessity and crossed without difficulty."

The same officer refers again to empty bottles when speaking of his billet:

In the crypt there were many empty bottles, whose contents had been consumed by the Germans two or three days before. The pigs had even turned on the taps of our hostess's cider casks so that we could not get any to drink; the smell of cider was very strong and very tantalising.

Once the British Expeditionary Force had crossed the Marne it began to engage in skirmishes of an extended order, followed by stiff fighting as it marched northward. The highlands north of the river provided numerous defensive positions for German rearguards; one of which was at Bezu, where, on the 9th, the Third Division came into action on its way to the north and suffered quite a number of casualties. Fortunately its field ambulances were in the neighbourhood, and the bearers brought to the dressing stations nearly 200 wounded, which kept officers and men of the R.A.M.C. hard at work throughout the night. One hundred and twenty of these wounded, the slightly hurt, were evacuated by motor lorry in the early hours of the 10th, when the bearers pushed on at once, leaving a tent division in charge of the more severe cases.

The Fifth Division fought its way up past Mery and Pisseloup, the one a pleasant little village surrounded by a long loop of the Marne, and the other a mere hamlet

to the north of St. Aulde, both situated on high ground. German rearguards were able to seize strong positions. Pisseloup is but a mile to the left of Bezu, where the 9th Brigade saw stiff fighting.

The field ambulances of the division gave great assistance. They were at Saacy, a straggling village just to the east of Mery, on the south bank of the river ; at Passy, on the north bank, a pleasant little village which peeps into the Marne valley, and at Mery itself. At this latter place tents were pitched, and the village church was placed at the service of the field ambulance. Meanwhile the bearers were all behind the fighting troops, close up to the scene of action and at times under fire. Shrapnel fire, in fact, limited their usefulness on some occasions. They worked on, however, far into the night, searching the heights on the way to Pisseloup, and collected a number of wounded. Three officers and fifty-nine other ranks of these were brought to the dressing station at Mery, and there made comfortable in the church.

Rain was falling in torrents, and water was splashing and bubbling from every spout and gargoyle of the ancient place. Within, the church lamps and those carried by the field ambulance barely served to illuminate more than the centre. There was only a dim twilight elsewhere, or dense black shadows. Placed along the aisles were the stretchers upon which lay the wounded, R.A.M.C. men passing from one to another, feeding them, offering hot milk or soup, or comforts of another description. The scrape of a match as one of the orderlies held a light to the cigarette which he had placed between the lips of one of the gallant wounded could be heard above the lowered tones of the officers of the R.A.M.C. at work in the centre of the edifice. There the portable operation table was set up in a space from which the pews had been cleared. Water boiled on an ancient stove in a far corner. Near at hand were the panniers filled with bulging dressings. There was the click of instruments lifted from the steriliser, deft fingers plied

scissors or scalpel. Then dressings were applied, the bandages secured, the patient lifted up on to a stretcher, and so to some peaceful corner. Meanwhile the next wounded man was lifted to the table, and as the orderlies stripped his saturated and mud-stained clothing aside, the anæsthetist bent over towards his patient, whispered encouraging words in his ear, patted his cheek maybe, and prepared him for operation. The subdued voices, the deep shadows, the lights flickering on altar and aisle and instruments, those wounded on the stretchers, and the Christ looking down as if in sympathy with all who suffered, completed a picture seen often enough elsewhere, and repeated on hundreds of occasions.

It is pleasant to be able to record on the authority of official writings the appreciation of those who were wounded. An officer of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, severely hurt in this action at Pisseloup, insisted on seeing the officer commanding the 15th Field Ambulance, and as he lay on his stretcher drew the special attention of Major H. W. Slaytor to the admirable conduct of Lance-Corporal Fawn of the R.A.M.C. and the bearer squad which he commanded. These five men, not content with wandering over the battlefield, which was anything but circumscribed, including hollows and hills and steep heights abutting upon the Marne, carried this officer back to the dressing station at Mery —a full five miles—exhausting work which was much to their credit.

Thursday, the 10th September, gave certain units of the British Expeditionary Force more strenuous work. Men of the First Corps were in action west of La Nouette, and later at Hautevesnes. There was fighting, too, at Priez, at Courchamps, and at Gandelu Ridge, all in the immediate neighbourhood, where other troops were engaged. The action, or actions—for the fighting was of a confused nature—turned out brilliantly for British arms. The 3rd Cavalry Brigade, thanks to the co-operation of the 5th, which was with it, captured 200 of the enemy, together with five machine-guns, while

the Second Division was instrumental in capturing more than 350 Germans and of killing numbers of them, the exact number being, however, unrecorded. The Third Division also took a hand, capturing some 600 prisoners near St. Gengulph and in the woods south of Vinly, both places within less than a mile of Hautevesnes.

Hautevesnes is a peaceful, rolling country-side, wooded and picturesque, and, unless one searches for it, unmarked by the hand of the despoiler. It is indeed difficult to believe that here in September 1914 men of the British divisions, hot foot after the Germans, taught the latter a severe lesson ; hard, too, to realise that along the country roads leading amongst the many woods and coppices, ambulance wagons creaked, and men of the R.A.M.C. at the heels of the fighting troops struggled to succour the wounded. Struggled, too, with considerable success, for their organisation allowed of speedy attention reaching the wounded man, and ensured care and comfort for him thereafter.

To-day — 1918 — Hautevesnes has again witnessed fighting, on this occasion of greater fierceness and of no less consequence. The spot marks approximately the farthest lunge south-westward of Germany's renewed attempt on Paris, and marks no less the southern point of Foch's counter-attack in July—stretched between it and Fontenoy. In 1914 it was Manoury's Sixth Army which so splendidly assisted to check the enemy's advance on Paris. In 1918 Foch's counter-attack—farther north —as dramatically checked the German advance, and then sweeping across the woods and hollows and undulations of Hautevesnes and other places, hurled the discomfited Crown Prince's forces back upon the Aisne and the Vesle. It was history repeated. But in 1914 French and British fought side by side in the Marne country. In 1918 Italian troops held the line near Rheims, while American troops fought their way beside French and British to and across the upper Ourcq, and so to the valleys of the Aisne and Vesle. Needless to state, like Hautevesnes, the hamlets and towns in those

valleys are wrecked. The country-side is seared and pock-marked by enemy shells and hostile action.

Cavalry field ambulances reached Courchamps, Gandelu, Torcy, and Passy, where dressing stations were opened. Forty or more wounded were brought to the dressing station at Courchamps, and twenty to that at Gandelu. Here also a number of wounded Germans were collected, while one of the cavalry field ambulances in question performed work which does not usually fall to the lot of such a unit. It captured thirty unwounded Germans. One of the cavalry field ambulances gathered many wounded at Vinly, where the enemy had been driven out of the woods, and then went on to Passy.

Bearer divisions of the medical units of the First Division dealt with what few casualties there were in the neighbourhood of La Nouette and then pushed on to Courchamps, where many wounded men were succoured. Seventy-seven in all were transferred to one of the following tent divisions toward midnight.

The Second Division had some officers and men killed and a considerable number wounded in the action at Hautevesnes, while its field ambulances picked up thirty Germans, so that, as may be imagined, they were fully occupied on the night of the 10th. The bearer division of the 5th Field Ambulance searched the battle-field all night, plodding in the heavy rain, and doing their best with the very indifferent candle lamps with which they were provided. Not once, but on many occasions have the officers commanding these mobile units of the Army Medical Service referred to the lamps in question. Useful enough in a dressing station and under cover, they were practically of little value out in the open in a drenching night such as this was. They had a habit of being blown out or of going out with exasperating ease, and every one knows how difficult it is to light such a lamp when rain is falling; matches get wet and sodden and will not strike, and the merest gust blows out the flame before the candle can be lighted.

Still, the bearers did wonderfully well, collecting the

wounded and carrying them to the dressing station which was at St. Gengulph. Quite close at hand also was the 6th Field Ambulance, which opened a dressing station at Chevillon, a little to the north of St. Gengulph. Its bearers with those of the 5th searched the rolling downs about Hautevesnes.

Two of the medical units of the Third Division followed the troops from Bezu northward, leaving one of the field ambulances at the latter place to care for and evacuate the wounded of the previous day's engagement. Those which marched sent their bearer divisions ahead, as was now the invariable custom, bearers and tent divisions coming together late at night at Chezy and at Dammard, well north of the scene of the Third Division operations. They had not collected many wounded, for the casualties resulting from the fighting at Bezu had kept them hard at work throughout the night of the 9th and had delayed their departure on the 10th, so that medical units of the Fifth Division and cavalry field ambulances were mainly responsible for clearing the battlefield. As showing the strain of these Marne operations and the rapid pursuit of the enemy, it is not without interest to note that the teams of the ambulance wagons of these two field ambulances which reached Chezy and Dammard were again thoroughly exhausted, though the ambulance wagons had borne very few wounded. The horses of one of the units were practically shoeless, and only the fortunate discovery of abandoned German horse-shoes, and the still more fortunate appearance of a shoeing smith, allowed this field ambulance to push on the following morning.

All the way to Montreuil-aux-Lions field ambulances of the Fifth Division came upon the dead from the previous day's fighting, and amongst them a certain number of wounded. The woods about were searched by the weary bearers, and altogether forty-five wounded were brought in, of whom quite a number were Germans. In addition, three German officers and forty men were found in the village, together with a few British wounded.

These were cared for in the Mairie, and in a school near by, where the field ambulances of the division transferred their wounded. In all, 1 officer and 21 other ranks British wounded, and 3 officers and 46 German wounded were collected. All the latter had been dressed before the German rearguard departed.

"The German wounded looked well-fed," writes Major F. G. Richards, R.A.M.C., "but they had enormous appetites," he remarks somewhat caustically.

With these enemy wounded there had remained four German medical orderlies, the first occasion on which such an event is reported, and these setting to work at once, gave considerable assistance.

Cleared of their wounded the field ambulances first buried 3 officers and 38 British other ranks and a number of German dead, and then marched to Chezy, where once more the work of opening dressing stations and of collecting wounded was repeated. The march north had not been altogether without incident. First they came upon a battery of six German guns captured during the previous day's fighting by the 1st Lincolnshires. Unluckily these troops were shelled out of the position by one of our own batteries. Hence the captured machine-guns lay derelict, as discovered by the field ambulance. Then numbers of German prisoners were seen, while other signs of a German defeat were not lacking. There were abandoned wounded, dead littering the road all the way to Hautevesnes and its neighbourhood, and everywhere enemy equipment, rifles, ammunition, and vehicles. Though rain poured upon the field ambulances the men were in the highest spirits, and not the least important item was the fact that rations reached them.

"Decidedly good and quite sufficient," is what an officer has to say of the British Army rations in 1914. "The troops look hard and well after these daily marches, and their health is remarkably good," is another of his very satisfactory reflections.

One other incident concerning the Fifth Division

medical units is worth recounting. As one marched into Passy it, like a fellow unit, secured a number of prisoners.

"Eleven Germans gave themselves up to us as prisoners," is the terse report, "four of them with side-arms and rifles yielding themselves to Private Smithers, R.A.M.C., when strolling in a wood."

How astonished Private Smithers must have been at the apparition of four dishevelled, bedraggled, and saturated Germans suddenly confronting him in the loneliness of the part to which he had strolled. Perhaps he felt inclined to bolt at the sight of them, but with what pride must this same Private Smithers have mounted guard over the Germans and marched them back to his commanding officer.

The 9th and 10th had been strenuous days for the medical units of the Fifth Division, and it is satisfactory to find that their work met with the approval of all parties. Despite the rain, despite the difficulty of the country, the rapid advance, and the numerous wounded, both British and German, not a single man who needed care had been neglected or overlooked; what was better, the fighting troops had never once got away from their medical units. That excellent organisation, which allowed of the rapid division of field ambulances, had permitted casualties in the firing-line to be treated almost immediately, and had safeguarded the interests of those wounded already picked up for whom transport was not yet available.

The three field ambulances reached Passy in the darkness, and in spite of the previous night's hard work, stripped off their dripping jackets and set to again to feed and care for other wounded. They had the satisfaction of knowing that those they had already dealt with were *en route* to the nearest railhead and the nearest ambulance train, for almost all had been placed upon empty motor lorries and sent off with R.A.M.C. orderlies to care for them. The Divisional G.O.C., just as solicitous for the comfort and care of his wounded men

as for those who remained under his command, must have taken special notice of the ambulances during the 9th and 10th of September, for he sent for Colonel R. H. S. Sawyer and particularly instructed him to state that "the work done by the medical units was as good as that of other branches of the Service." It was saying much. The British soldier, gallant soul that he is, had, to say the least of it, done good work on the Marne, at Bezu, at Pisseloup, at Montreuil, and then again at Hautevesnes and Vinly.

Third Corps medical units need but a line of description, for the corps, when the fighting was done at La Ferte-sous-Jouarre, where the Petit Morin pours into the Marne, met with little opposition on its march north to Cocherel and Coulombs, though it is worth mentioning that at the latter place more abandoned German wounded were come upon. There were forty-three of them, which No. 11 Field Ambulance took charge of at once, and in due course sent down to the railway.

A glance at the map (VIII.) shows that the march of the British Expeditionary Force had now taken the three corps and the cavalry division well up the eastern bank of the Ourcq and far on its road to the River Aisne, where in the course of a few days a terrific struggle was to open.

September the 10th witnessed the end of the Marne operations, and the 12th saw the British Expeditionary Force spread across the country south of the river Aisne between Soissons on the west and Villers on the east, approaching the final obstacle which the Germans had opposed to its progress. French and British were indeed but a short distance from the Chemin des Dames, the road which runs east and west along the heights to the north of the river Aisne, and before which German trenches and German defensive positions, possibly already selected, were to hold up their triumphal progress. They were within short distance of the line and but a few hours of the time when a war of movement was to be converted into a long, tedious siege war. For those

trenches along the Chemin des Dames were to extend westward a little and then north, and so to creep ever northward until they crossed the Belgian frontier not so far from Ypres and on to the coast of Belgium.

To summarise the work of the medical units during these Marne operations : more lessons had been learned, as was only natural, just as they had been learned in the retreat to Paris ; but what a difference in the record of the doings of the units of the Army Medical Service ! Times had been strenuous enough, the weather of late had been appalling, yet the fundamental principles of organisation of the field ambulances had assisted them to carry on their duty in most commendable manner.

In spite of the hitch down at the base, and the sudden and unavoidable upheaval of the heavier units, they too were, as it were, "getting into their stride"; and though clearing hospitals were not yet doing the work expected of them, nor one-tenth of that which they were soon to accomplish, yet during these Marne operations they lent real assistance.

Finally, it may be said that the organisation generally of the R.A.M.C. was settling down under new and strange conditions, and though not as yet giving all the assistance expected of it, it had gone far in that direction. The Aisne, as will be presently seen, provided the corps with an opportunity to do even better, and to consolidate its work from Front to Base. The Aisne, too, gave numerous opportunities for the display of more than professional skill on behalf of the personnel of the field ambulances. They will be met with in due course under heavy fire at Vailly, at St. Marguerite, and other places on the north bank of the Aisne, working devotedly for their patients.

From the River Marne and its tributaries to the sluggish Aisne is no great distance, yet to the combatants and to the numerous non-combatants who pressed north after the action at Hautevesnes the advance was no easy progression. September of 1914, ushered in in brilliant style, with a blaze of sunshine

which showed this wonderful country in all the grandeur of its sylvan beauty, presently exhibited atrocious weather conditions. Rain descended in torrents. Fields and woods and glades were drenched, and bivouacs became quagmires. The roads, good enough in most weather for ordinary traffic, became churned into sloughs of deep mud under the grinding of the multitude of wheels and horses and men which now flowed along them. Thus as the field ambulances struggled forward, the lighter sections in touch with the fighting troops, and the heavier some miles behind, relieving the advance parties of sick and wounded, the effort to maintain contact, to evacuate casualties, to keep horses and personnel in almost continuous movement demanded almost as great energy as had those stern days of retreat, when a grilling sun poured down upon the baked, dusty roads, and when mud and rain and swamp were undreamed of. Yet the task was accomplished. The mobile units of the R.A.M.C. which had been with the British Expeditionary Force since the first days at Mons were on or about the bluffs and heights of the Aisne River as the German guns opened upon our advancing infantry. War-worn and weary it may be, their ranks thinned here and there, the polish of peace times smeared by the dust and mud of the fighting, the field ambulances nevertheless were now more competent to carry out their duties. For Mons and Maroilles, Landrecies and Le Cateau, the changing fortunes during the fighting on the way to Paris and later across the Marne country had provided a wealth of experience. Units were closer knitted together. Those who had been strangers to one another at the time of embarking for France were now old friends, who had learned what was to be expected of one another, what were each individual's powers, what his faults and failings. Like the horses which still survived—and some of them found their way into Flanders when the Aisne was done with, and one field medical unit actually lost none of its horses—officers and men were now running smoothly together in harness,

and were fully prepared and eager for another struggle. It was at hand. The operations along the length of the River Aisne between Soissons and Villers provided the R.A.M.C. with problems and dangers and difficulties not hitherto encountered.

BATTLE POSITIONS ON THE AISNE.

# CHAPTER XIV

The River Aisne—Advance from Hautevesnes—Weather conditions—A new problem for the R.A.M.C.—Severe shelling—Difficulties in crossing the river—The military situation.

The River Aisne runs its devious course across the centre of the northern province of France, rising in tiny rivulets in the Ardennes, within sight of Sedan, and flowing west past such places as Rethel, Neufchâtel, Villers, Vailly, and Soissons till it pours into the Oise at Compiègne. It is fed by numerous tributaries during its sinuous length, one of which in particular concerns this narrative of British medical units. It is the Vesle, which rises amidst the chalk plains east of Châlons-sur-Marne, and upon which stands Rheims, the famous cathedral city. Thence the stream—for it barely deserves the name of river—meanders north-west till it tumbles into the Aisne near Condé, not a dozen miles to the east of Soissons. How insignificant it is may be appreciated by the fact that men of the Second British Division, pushing north after the Marne, crossed the Vesle at Braisne by means of a flimsy bridge composed merely of a painter's ladder along which was laid a single plank.

That part of the Aisne with which the British Expeditionary Force was concerned in September 1914, flows between Villers to the east and Soissons to the west, a stretch of little more than fifteen miles in length. Those fifteen miles, however, present terrain which offers numerous opportunities to a defending force, and places many difficulties in the path of those who would advance north over the river. Here the Aisne meanders—deep and comparatively narrow—down the centre of a wide

valley, the southern basin of which is heaped with numerous hillocks and is steeply undulating, wooded bluffs here and there almost overhanging the water, though for the most part the high ground stands back from the channel of the Aisne, offering space in between for a road, a canal, and a railway, and for many a village. On the northern bank the ground rises steadily and rather more sharply, till, all along the length between Soissons and Villers, it reaches an upland plateau, which frowns down upon the valley and upon the wooded approaches to it. It is, in fact, the eastern end of the high land which continues on towards Compiègne, though as it nears that place it becomes of lower elevation, while the river valley itself broadens out considerably, and on the southern bank particularly becomes merged in forest country.

Turning north-east after the action at Hautevesnes, the field ambulances struggled on in the pouring rain after the rapidly advancing divisions past such places as Marigny, Neuilly, Vinly, and Chezy-en-Orxois, where few had time or inclination to pause to view the fine old church which adorns that provincial spot. Wooded country surrounded them, and in the copses lay many a startled and frightened Prussian ; startled because of the sudden and, to them, inexplicable change in the fortunes of the army of which they had formed a part, and frightened because of the swarms of British soldiers and the exulting French peasants who—now that Von Klück had been swept back—appeared from every odd hole and corner.

" Parties of Germans were wandering about in the woods looking for an Englishman to surrender to," an R.A.M.C. officer says ; " they were terrified to surrender to the French peasants for fear of having their throats cut."

This hardly gives rise to astonishment when it is explained that one of the field ambulances splashing along through the pools of water and thick mud had already, in these parts, come upon two unfortunate

peasants who had, to quote the record left us, "been murdered." Doubtless other French peasants had seen them, and, well, the German had set his own standard of Kultur. It is not for him to grumble if humble yet patriotic peasants retaliated.

No more wretched night was ever spent by the R.A.M.C. than that of the 12th, when, for the most part, medical units concentrated in their divisional areas within sight of the Aisne, and already within range of the enemy. Pitiless, relentless sheets of rain had poured upon them all day, and now that the advance of the British Expeditionary Force was checked and units with the advance guard were caught up by main bodies and by baggage trains, the little accommodation there was was all too insufficient to shelter every man off duty. Few indeed of the field medical units found billets, and when they did they revelled in them. One, Charles Hacard, a peasant farmer of the country, gave open-handed hospitality to one of the field ambulances.

"When the German invasion swept over Cuiry Housse he"—the worthy Charles Hacard—"buried all his drinkables under a layer of clay in his barn, and the Germans had not found them," writes an officer of the R.A.M.C. gloatingly, remembering the drenched condition of all on arrival. "He gave us some of the most wonderful cognac I have ever tasted in my life," he adds, almost with an appreciative smack of the lips.

The officers of that lucky unit actually slept in beds that night, an almost forgotten luxury, while the men snuggled down in a barn liberally floored with straw.

Elsewhere the field ambulances bivouacked or scrambled for the few billets there were, though a number of them were already engaged with wounded. For the battle of the Aisne had commenced, and even at night German guns were feeling for British troops as they pushed their way steadily northward. Those same guns, it will be found, raised one more, and this time an even greater difficulty in the path of the R.A.M.C. During the day every bridge, every road, and every town, village, and hamlet within range and sight of the German position

was subjected to shell-fire. Not field-gun fire, such as medical units had faced at Mons, Le Cateau, and on the Marne; but from 10-inch howitzers, throwing high-explosive shells which smashed houses as if they were built of cardboard, and which caused numerous casualties to fighting troops and in the ranks of the R.A.M.C.

This shelling made evacuation of the wounded from over the Aisne an almost impossible feat during the daytime. It was attempted at first, and then reluctantly abandoned. Even the enthusiasm of a party of bearers is apt to evaporate when its progress with wounded is checked, as in one case within a few hours of the opening of the Aisne operations: shells plunged in front of the detachment and brought it to a halt; others fell behind it, anchoring it to the road. In but a short space of time 350 high-explosive shells crashed into the immediate surroundings of this adventurous party.

The illustration emphasises this new problem which now faced the medical service; for it will help to explain how it was that dressing stations opened on the far side of the river became congested on some occasions, and how, when these dressing stations were shelled—which they were more often than not—and when they were subjected to an alarming bombardment, evacuation of the wounded was frequently an impossibility. All that could be done was to soothe the wounded and hold on till darkness and the arrival of convoys of ambulance wagons relieved an oftentimes intolerable situation.

Evacuation of wounded being for the above-mentioned reason an impossibility during the daytime, evacuation by night was resorted to, and throughout the Aisne operations the scheme devised worked for the most part with satisfying regularity. This scheme provided an advanced dressing station, or more than one, for each division of infantry and for cavalry brigades north of the river, in close touch in every case with regimental medical officers and their regimental aid posts, from which evacuation to advanced dressing stations during the day was, as a general rule, feasible if often a somewhat

hazardous proceeding. Each advanced dressing station was staffed with a sufficient, but not too numerous personnel, since shelling had always to be expected, and casualties in the R.A.M.C. had already been severe. Then, as dusk fell, the river and the dressing stations became trysting places for columns of bearers and ambulance wagons, which crossed the bridges, all of which were subjected to enemy shell-fire even at night-time, though then, as a rule, only at irregular intervals. On the south bank the main dressing stations or collecting stations of the divisions received the wounded and passed them on in due course to clearing hospitals.

Evacuation from the north bank of the river was rendered additionally arduous for another reason. The condition of the bridges, their destruction or partial destruction by the retiring Germans, and the unavoidable delay in making them good or in throwing pontoons produced a position of affairs at the onset of the action and for many hours afterwards which at times threatened to be critical. Bearer divisions were north of the river by then, and had indeed followed close upon the heels of the fighting troops. Tent divisions for the most part were on the south bank, in Villers, Pont Arcy, L'Hôpital, Chassemy, Sermoise, Ciry, Jury, Venizel, Billy-sur-Aisne, Septmonts, or adjacent villages, heavily shelled in frequent cases, and connected with their bearer divisions merely by a succession of flimsy bridges across which wheeled traffic was often impossible at first, so that wounded men must be carried across on stretchers. The R.A.M.C. has had its share of difficult positions, where this or that must be improvised, or where problems must be faced and solved on the instant. The presence of ambulance wagons on the north bank of the river was an essential, and seeing that some of the bridges in the early hours of the action were not capable of supporting wheeled traffic, the *impassé* was swept aside by manhandling the wagons over and then leading the horses singly; from which it will appear that the R.A.M.C. is not

employed alone in the treatment of sick and wounded, but has other duties which call for energy and initiative.

This transfer of ambulance wagons to the north bank helped not a little to solve the question of clearing advanced dressing stations, till then threatened with congestion. More particularly was this the case at Bucy-le-Long, St. Marguerite and Chivres, held by the Fourth and Fifth Divisions. These three villages border the road which winds along the northern bank, a straggling line of stone-built farms and barns and cottages, each with its pleasant, picturesque church and miniature churchyard, and all faced on the north side by steeply rising, wooded ground, cleft by numerous gullies, ascending to the plateau above. It was there that the enemy lay entrenched, his exact position difficult to locate, his field of fire open as far as and beyond the river. Though heavily attacked he was not driven off the slopes or the plateau, and as a consequence the Fourth Division lay along the line of the road, a little in advance of it, with the stone farms and houses immediately behind, and the river but a little farther. It was from a strictly military point of view not a position which a commander could regard with confidence. It might become precarious at any moment seeing that the battered bridge at Venizel, always under observation of German batteries, was his only means of withdrawing his division in case of an attack in overwhelming force on the part of the enemy. For similar reasons, it was not the happiest place for dressing stations. The long straggling line of houses, once so picturesque—for indeed there is no prettier part than this country-side abutting on Soissons even with its houses in ruins—was always under shell-fire, and therefore the retention of wounded even for an hour was not to be encouraged. But attack and counter-attack provided an abundance of wounded, and all the bearers of the field ambulances would have been insufficient to carry them to the bridge at Venizel, even supposing there had not been work for the bearers elsewhere. Ambulance wagons were an essential, and

though hardly used during daylight, cleared the dressing stations in most satisfactory manner once night had fallen.

Having given a general view, as it were, of the Aisne operations as they concerned the field ambulances of the R.A.M.C., it needs now to particularise to some extent on the purely military operations. It has been remarked before that the battle of the Aisne gave the *coup de grâce* to the war of manœuvre or movement which had hitherto occupied the British Expeditionary Force and our French Ally, and witnessed the commencement of a long and tedious, though often terrific trench conflict. The statement, however, needs a little amplification, for after the Aisne operations had arrived at a position of stalemate, manœuvre warfare did for a short while occupy all forces. There followed a race to the North Sea coast, the Germans constantly extending their right flank and feeding it with reinforcements in the effort to close in upon and crush the left flank of the Allies and to join hands with their troops then sweeping across Belgium towards Antwerp. The British Expeditionary Force and the French did likewise, extending their left, till, about the middle of October, the two contending forces were spread from the point of confluence of the Aisne with the Oise, at Compiègne, in a long straggling line to the Flemish coast near Dunkirk. For a while the line oscillated. Then hostilities settled down once more into siege warfare.

When the divisions of the British Expeditionary Force gained the valley of the Aisne, and German guns opened for the first time on them, it was not fully comprehended that the advance to the north was about to be definitely checked. The main bodies of the enemy were retiring over the Chemin des Dames, leaving behind them strong rearguards, many of them south of the river. With these the British cavalry came into action on the 12th, the 1st and 2nd Cavalry Brigades participating in some lively street fighting in Braisne, in which units of the First Division assisted. Here it was that the eager

advance of the Second Division was checked by the Vesle River, over which the men finally passed by means of a ladder and a plank, though some crossed over a disused railway bridge.

This capture of Braisne and the clearing of the country to the Aisne as far as Pont Arcy cost the enemy many casualties, and numbers were taken prisoner. That night the men of the First Corps were crammed into every available billet in the villages along the valley of the Vesle or in those adjacent.

The Second Corps advanced to the left bank of the Vesle, on the immediate left of the First Corps, which it assisted in the action at Braisne, the Third Division taking 100 prisoners. This division and the Fifth, sheltered from the rain at night in Brenelle, Braisne, and in other villages on the left bank of the Vesle as far west as Serches. At the former place, it should be mentioned, the 3rd Cavalry Brigade, which headed the advance of the Second Corps towards Vailly, made short and satisfactory work of a German attack launched from that direction, securing 101 prisoners. Then they galloped on to Vailly Bridge and attacked German infantry who were holding it.

To the Fourth Division, which, with the 19th Brigade, comprised as yet the only units of the Third Corps, belongs the honour of first crossing the Aisne. It marched on the immediate left of the Second Corps, having the Sixth French Army on its own left. Venizel Bridge was discovered to be only partly destroyed. The enemy sappers had fired four charges, one of which had failed to explode, and though the steel joists of the bridge were shattered, the ferro-concrete roadway was partially intact. It was only a slender thread, however, across which men of the 11th Infantry Brigade passed in single file on their way to Bucy-le-Long and the villages previously referred to. The remainder of the corps rested south of the Aisne; the Sixth Division was at the moment marching through the country of the Marne, and was still many miles distant. It had dis-

embarked at St. Nazaire during the course of the Marne operations.

Other crossings of the River Aisne are worthy of description, seeing that they concern the R.A.M.C. greatly. To take them in the order of the three corps, the bridges and their condition were as follows. That at Villers was down and useless. Opposite Bourg, however, an aqueduct carries a branch of the canal over the Aisne, and was found intact. The First Division crossed by it. At Pont Arcy the crossing had been shattered, though the 5th Infantry Brigade clambered to the north bank by way of the broken and tumbled girders. At Chavonne, where the 4th Infantry Brigade attempted a crossing, the bridge was not practicable, and, in addition, was strongly held by the enemy. Next comes Vailly. The bridge here was shattered, but usable, at least so it was considered by the Third Division, two brigades of which crossed by means of a single, wobbling, and all too unsteady plank which bridged the gap blown in the centre of the structure. Condé Bridge was not seriously attempted, for the enemy were in force, and indeed remained there during the whole course of the Aisne operations. At Missy, near by, the structure had gone and rafts were necessary. Lastly, there is Venizel, bridging the stream from one osier-clad bank to another, and partially shattered, yet practicable for infantry, for the 11th Infantry Brigade streamed across it.

Little space can be given to the further movements of the various units of the British Expeditionary Force other than those of the R.A.M.C. But a broad statement will facilitate the more detailed narrative of medical arrangements for the military operations in progress, and will tend to make clearer the movements and actions of individual field ambulances, and of officers and men of the R.A.M.C. of other medical formations behind the actual fighting front. It should be stated in the first instance that the Aisne operations of the British Expeditionary Force can be conveniently divided into

three phases, that of attack, defence, and then evacuation of the position. The first of these lasted for a very short period, the attack progressing more favourably in front of Sir Douglas Haig's First Corps than elsewhere. Only during this initial phase was the actual position of affairs comprehended. Where it had been confidently hoped that the enemy would be driven north from the heights of the Aisne, just as he had been from those of the Marne, presently it was appreciated that here was his main and most formidable position, where he had concentrated his corps, rushed up his reserves, and was holding a line which had been carefully prepared for defence. Moreover, behind it were massed heavy batteries which he had not hitherto had in operation.

Unfortunately there was not at the moment another French army ready to be rushed into position near and north of Compiègne and flung for a second time at Von Klück's right flank. Unfortunately, too, it was not yet realised that the Germans had definitely elected to stand on the Aisne with the view of there arresting a further advance on the part of the Allies. Had this enemy intention been recognised, a frontal attack would not perhaps have been attempted. Reviewing the position long months after the event, it seems clear that an immediate transfer of troops to the north-west might have outflanked the German position on the Chemin des Dames and sent Von Klück north again. But no troops were available. No additional French Army capable of undertaking a flanking manœuvre similar to that of Manoury's Sixth Army in the Marne operations was at the immediate call of Joffre. Reserves were scattered, and the Allied line had few supports or reserves to depend on. So it happened the British Expeditionary Force was flung headlong over the river, and fought its way uphill toward the plateau till an almost impregnable position, and overwhelming numbers and guns, first checked and then stopped the offensive.

The crossing of the river by the First and Second Divisions was the prelude to severe fighting. They

gained Beaulne, Verneuil, Moulins, Vendresse, and Paissy on the 13th. On the 14th they pushed the line farther north and west, and all day long a fierce contest raged about a sugar factory north of Troyon. Here the 2nd Royal Sussex Regiment and the 1st Loyal North Lancashire Regiment displayed the most remarkable prowess. Beaten back at first, Major Greave's company at length forced its way into the factory where, or adjacent to which, the 2nd King's Royal Rifles and 2nd Royal Sussex Regiment captured twelve guns. But they were thrown out again. At one stage in the fighting some of the 3rd Brigade actually swept over the Chemin des Dames and took La Bouvelle Farm. But they, too, had to withdraw. Then counter-attacks were launched by the enemy every hour till night fell, and every succeeding day till far on into September. Not that these counter-attacks were always of a formidable nature. They diminished in number and intensity until on the 26th and 27th they of a sudden developed in intensity and determination, calling for the finest qualities of endurance on the part of our troops in that area.

The Third Division was directed on the 13th upon Vailly, a considerable village of stone houses, with one main street which opens into an unambitious "Place" at the top, whence roads struggle uphill to left and right by way of convenient gullies. The township bulks largely in the story of field ambulances. Its church is an ancient structure which has withstood nearly four years of German shelling, and though roofless and more or less a wreck, still in 1917 presented an almost unbroken façade, for the stone-work of the west front, with its fretted window, had escaped much of the general ruin. In September 1914 it echoed to the tread of stretcher-bearers, its aisles were littered with wounded, shrapnel beat a tattoo on its roof, and shells crashed through its massive walls.

To this little town or large village the Third Division gained access across that slender plank already mentioned, shells plumping into the water on either hand.

By night sappers had thrown a pontoon. Only the 8th and 9th Infantry Brigades, the men of Nimy, Jemappes, and Le Cateau crossed that day. Presently the 7th was thrown across also, and there for days the three brigades held on stoutly to the slopes leading to the plateau above, from which, however, they failed to drive the German. He in his turn could not oust the Third Division, which resisted during the course of September a number of murderous attacks, and supported with characteristic stoicism shelling which was almost continuous, and at times terrific.

The Fifth Division got some of its men across at Missy by means of three rafts, and later by pontoon. It seized the slopes leading to Chivres, its left on St. Marguerite, but could make no progress. Its history is more or less a repetition of that of the Third Division, for it held on gamely in spite of every enemy effort, and broke up all attempted counter-attacks.

The Third Corps needs but a few words. Its units have been traced to Bucy-le-Long and other villages. It, too, failed to force an advance, and like the Third and Fifth Divisions was subjected to numerous attempted counter-attacks.

The comparative want of success of the Second and Third Corps deserves some explanation other than that afforded by the difficulty of the terrain in contrast to that farther east. It is to be discovered in the lack of effective artillery support from which these particular corps suffered. Good artillery positions were not to be had on the north bank. The area of operations there was far too circumscribed, while on the south bank such possible positions as there were were so far south as to make counter-battery work almost impossible. Hence the two corps in question were indifferently supported as compared with the First Corps, and that, and particularly difficult terrain and positions overlooked for the most part, made their achievement, such as it was, something to be proud of.

That is broadly the purely military side of the Aisne

operations. It gives no detail, and has not referred to the two brigades of cavalry which held the line from Chavonne to the imposing ruins of the once magnificent château at Soupir. It does not recount hundreds of features of greatest interest nor the gallant actions of individuals. It merely provides the groundwork upon which to erect the narrative of the medical service.

## CHAPTER XV

First Division Medical units—The medical situation and medical arrangements behind the First Division—Difficulties at Villers—French assistance in clearing British wounded—First use of motor ambulances for evacuation—British casualties—R.A.M.C. casualties.

It was still raining as the First Division moved out of its billets at a very early hour on 13th September and took the road to the river, following units of the cavalry division. With it marched the bearer divisions of its field ambulances, each with its brigade group, the tent division of the 3rd Field Ambulance following, while those of the other two medical units remained at or near Vauxcere, on the road to Villers from Bazoches, and perhaps three miles from it.

By mid-day the division had reached Bourg, crossing river and canal by the canal aqueduct which was found undamaged. No active opposition had been met with, and the few casualties there were were the result of hostile shell-fire.

The 1st and 2nd Cavalry Brigades had preceded the infantry and had won their way to Pargnan, just north of the river from Villers, where they were in touch with French troops, and to Vendresse and Moulins, whence the Germans withdrew. With these cavalry brigades went light sections of the cavalry field ambulances who dealt with the wounded, of whom there were no great number.

On the left of the First Division lay the Second, which had crossed the river at Pont Arcy rather late in the day owing to enemy opposition.

The 14th September was another cheerless and

miserably wet day. It found the British Expeditionary Force astir before daylight had come, and long columns of infantry were already issuing from Bourg when day dawned. Farther afield cavalry units were keeping in touch with the French, who also were well over the river. With our cavalry, as on the previous day, were light ambulance sections, now so mobile that in spite of only possessing horse transport they were able to keep up with their units. The heavier portions of the cavalry field ambulances had meanwhile remained on the south bank of the river. Now, however, they—the 1st, 3rd, and 4th—were detailed to concentrate at an early hour close to the railway at Villers, where a pontoon had been thrown to the north bank. Here the 1st and 4th Cavalry Field Ambulances opened a dressing station in a sugar factory, while parties from the bearer divisions crossed the pontoon and worked under Major Cowey of the 1st Cavalry Field Ambulance on the north side of the river. Other bearers from No. 4 Cavalry Field Ambulance were sent along the banks of the river and presently returned bringing wounded. Meanwhile the 3rd Cavalry Field Ambulance had also crossed the pontoon and taken up a position on the far bank. The 5th Medical unit attached to the Cavalry division was associated with the 2nd Cavalry Field Ambulance, which was working behind Vailly with the Third Division.

The two divisions of the First Corps were now well on in their progress up the slopes leading towards the Chemin des Dames, and the First Division after a rapid march to just south of Moulins came into action with the enemy who was holding the heights at Vendresse, Paissy, and farther north at Troyon.

The bearer divisions of the medical units affiliated to this division formed part of the column marching from Bourg, that of the 2nd Field Ambulance being in advance of those of the other two field ambulances. It at once opened an advanced dressing station at the cross-roads south of Vendresse, where the road from Verneuil joins that from Bourg and pushes on to Troyon. The bearers

of the 3rd Field Ambulance arrived at Vendresse itself very soon afterwards and opened their advanced dressing station in the Mairie and a building next door. Then stretcher squads from all three bearer divisions moved up toward the firing-line. To these two advanced dressing stations the lighter wounded began to come in from an early hour of the day, and later the bearers staggered down the steep grass slopes or came along the roads when they were free from shell-fire, bringing the more seriously wounded.

The bearers of the 1st Field Ambulance, however, did not contribute very largely to the success of the day's operations, for the area in which they were working was being severely shelled, and for quite a long while they lay, as it were, under the lee of the heights of Vendresse, where they were out of view of German gunners and had some shelter from shell-fire.

So acute was the action, and so many wounded were coming in now to the dressing stations, that the A.D.M.S. ordered up the tent divisions of the 3rd and 1st Field Ambulances. These came upon the scene after nightfall, the 3rd moving into a château at Vendresse, and the 1st halting at Moulins, a little south and well to the east of it, where it opened in buildings which were so placed as to be sheltered by the hills. The advance of these two tent divisions from the river had been no easy affair. For instance, the tent division of the 1st Field Ambulance had crossed the two pontoons which now were thrown across the canal and the river to Bourg, and had there "stood by" all day listening to the artillery engagement, which was of the severest nature, and watching shells as they plunged into the river and all about them. At 6 P.M. they began a difficult march through unknown country by steep and narrow roads to Vendresse. No lights were allowed, so that the difficulties were accentuated. At Vendresse the ambulance parked in drizzling rain, and the treatment of wounded was at once begun.

Meanwhile the tent division of No. 2 Field Ambulance

following the column reached Œuilly, where it opened its dressing station in a farm, from which it was presently driven by heavy shell-fire, which killed one of its personnel. It halted and outspanned at Villers, just to the south of the river, and later prepared for wounded in the Château and in the Mairie. Here it was to act as a divisional collecting station, and was to be prepared to take in all the cases admitted by the 1st and 3rd Field Ambulances at Moulins and Vendresse.

When night had at length fallen the medical situation of the First Division comprised advanced dressing stations at Vendresse and Moulins, which bearer divisions handed over to the 1st and 3rd Field Ambulances respectively, while subsidiary advanced dressing stations were opened to east and west by the bearers, and were indeed combined dressing stations and regimental aid posts, for here regimental medical officers acted conjointly with those of the bearer divisions. These subsidiary advanced dressing stations were at or near Chivy, Beaulne, Paissy, and Troyon, and in practically every case were within easy distance of the firing-line, a fact made possible by the peculiar nature of the ground which gave excellent cover.

These advanced dressing stations sent their wounded to the dressing stations at Vendresse and Moulins, whence they were to be evacuated to the south bank of the river at Villers, where was the divisional collecting station already mentioned, connected with the two advanced dressing stations by a good, if rather circuitous road, and by two pontoon bridges. The position is one to be carefully noted, inasmuch as with slight modifications it continued until the early days of October.

The first effort at evacuation proved disastrous. The bearers of the 2nd Field Ambulance, who had a dressing station in Vendresse, organised an ambulance wagon column, and filled their wagons with sitting cases, those wounded able to walk being formed up in the column. In the midst of this operation a high-explosive shell plunged into the ground near by, killing two R.A.M.C.

men and one patient, and causing the horses to stampede. But the column was reorganised, and eventually four ambulance wagons filled with wounded and accompanied by 100 walking cases reached the divisional collecting station at Villers. Other columns from the advanced dressing stations followed, thus relieving the congestion already gravely threatened by the constant influx of cases. Thereafter a column of ambulance wagons left the dressing stations every night, taking cases down to and across the river.

The 15th of September gave no rest to the R.A.M.C., while the rain poured down pitilessly without sign of cessation. It was a heavier day for the units of the First Division, and owing to the large number of wounded the question of evacuation presently became acute. The difficulty was not so much that wounded could not be cleared from the advanced dressing stations at Vendresse and Moulins, for quite possible roads led from those places by way of Bourg and Œuilly to Villers, and were not so completely under enemy observation as elsewhere.

It was at Villers that the real difficulty was now met with, and once more the dearth of swift and efficient transport threatened to wreck R.A.M.C. operations, which, up to this point in the line of evacuation, had worked well in spite of difficulties. By noon of the 15th cases were pouring into the divisional collecting station, and it looked as though the 2nd Field Ambulance would presently be overwhelmed and its accommodation prove too slender. Evacuation to Braisne was only possible by motor supply column, and that, as the A.D.M.S. knew, was an uncertain quantity. In this extremity he appealed to Corps Headquarters, and with the help of the Liaison Officer requested the assistance of the French military authorities, who had a certain number of motor ambulances. Our Ally responded generously, and on the 16th lent twenty motor omnibuses and ten motor ambulances.

Meanwhile, on the afternoon of the 15th, 260 cases

were cleared from Villers by motor supply column, but 300 still remained, to which many more were added during the 16th. The position was again becoming acute, when the Royal Flying Corps sent six of their motor lorries, and in addition the A.D.M.S. was able to secure some from the motor supply column. These once more saved the situation, the Royal Flying Corps lorries making two journeys to Braisne, and the supply column running right through to Fère-en-Tardenois, a journey which must have caused the severely wounded acute anguish. To these the French motor vehicles lent admirable assistance not only at Villers but also towards the front; nine of the motor ambulances being sent up to Chivy close behind the 4th Guards Brigade, where was one of the western dressing stations thrown out by the A.D.M.S. This the French motor ambulances cleared, taking the cases to Bazoches.

It was the first occasion on which British cases had been moved by motor ambulance wagons, and the celerity of evacuation was so remarkable that it could not fail to impress all who took note of it. It was not quite a red-letter day for the R.A.M.C. That was to arrive on or about the 20th, when motor ambulances were first issued to field medical units. Further comment is made elsewhere, yet it is an opportune moment to note the fact that the R.A.M.C. was on the eve of an all-important development.

The R.A.M.C. in the forward area continued its work during this day under equally difficult conditions; shelling was extremely heavy, and interfered greatly with the activity of the bearers. At times it cut the regimental aid posts completely adrift from the dressing stations, and the latter from the collecting station down by the river. As a consequence, these respective centres for the collection of the wounded became congested, and evacuation was so imperatively needed that risks had to be taken.

At Moulins, for instance, the influx of wounded caused the officer in charge of the dressing station there

to commandeer the church as a hospital, and here, still under shell-fire, he sheltered more wounded, his bearers having numerous escapes from shell fragments. His ambulance wagons plying between the dressing station and the advanced dressing stations were hit on numerous occasions, testifying to the severity of conditions.

Then there cropped up the difficulty of feeding the wounded; shell-fire not only made their evacuation difficult, but arrested or delayed the supply columns. The sodden state of the roads, too, caused further delay, so that rations were soon expended. However, there were still a few civilians sheltering in the cellars of the houses, and these responded to a call for food, which they were glad to sell or give to the British. With the shells still plunging about the place, the cooks got to work, and presently hot soup, mutton and vegetables were being dispensed to all the patients.

At Vendresse conditions were practically similar. Bearers were working at Paissy and later at Troyon, where the fighting had now increased in violence. All day long, in fact, the weary bearers staggered along the shell-swept roads from the advanced dressing stations either to Vendresse or Moulins, while others trudged south beside the ambulance wagons, risking the enemy shells, and safely conveying wounded to the divisional collecting station at Villers.

The chief incidents on the 16th relate to Troyon. Here the severe fighting of the previous day and night had produced heavy casualties, which were sheltered in some caves—that part of the Aisne being honeycombed with caves. Here they were pinned to their shelters by severe shell-fire, and evacuation was quite out of the question. Major H. A. Hinge, who was responsible for the medical arrangements in this area of the operations, himself went up to the advanced dressing station, which was close to the Chemin des Dames and very near the trenches. After discussion, he decided to clear the wounded direct to Villers, and seizing the opportunity of a lull in the firing, loaded his ambulance wagons and

sent them home post haste to the collecting station. His own return was delayed by more shell-fire; in fact it took two hours to cover the comparatively short journey from Troyon to Vendresse: "Had a very exciting ride back, with shells bursting everywhere," is all he notes; but the incident conveys some idea of the conditions under which the medical units were working.

The days which followed provided numerous incidents similar to those which had arisen during the 14th, 15th, and 16th. The R.A.M.C. working at Paissy and at Troyon, as in the case of the combatants just in front of them, were deluged with shells, while Moulins and Vendresse came in for their own share. For instance, the church at Moulins received a direct hit on the 18th, and tiles and rafters came tumbling in on the patients; a barn used as an advanced dressing station was destroyed, while the streets outside were constantly struck, and the neighbourhood echoed to the detonation of enemy missiles.

It was not until the 20th that the stress of these conditions lessened. By then the enemy had turned his attention to the point where French and British troops joined hands, approximately just north of Paissy. The advanced dressing station at this place had recently been abandoned but was now reopened, and it and Troyon both produced their quota of wounded.

The position of the medical units of the First Division had undergone some alteration in the past few days, partly for the reason that a brigade of the newly arrived Sixth Division had relieved a portion of the First Division on the 19th, partly also because the intensity of the action along the front had lessened, though shelling was pretty constant. The bearer division of the 2nd Field Ambulance was sent back to its headquarters at Villers, and also the main portion of the 1st Field Ambulance. Some of the bearers and a section of the tent division remained at Troyon. The advanced dressing station at Moulins was closed, while a section of the tent division of No. 3 Field Ambulance and one

bearer subdivision took over the advanced dressing station at Vendresse; the bulk of the unit returning to Villers.

The first stage in the Aisne operations was now practically over as regards the First Division. Fighting still went on along the front it is true, but there were no longer any British attacks. The position facing the British Expeditionary Force was deemed to be impregnable, and defensive warfare had now taken the place of the previous offensive. On the part of the Germans, however, frequent attacks were made, and these still yielded many casualties for the field ambulances to deal with. Still, the conditions were quiet as compared with those of the 14th–17th September.

The acute stage of the Aisne fighting having now lapsed, the hard-worked R.A.M.C. attached to the First Division enjoyed a brief spell of comparative rest to fit them for the coming struggle in Flanders. Shell-fire, the steep roads *en route* to the Chemin des Dames, and other difficulties had tried them severely, but perhaps the truest index to those trials is obtained from mention of the wounded they dealt with. This first phase of the fighting and the German counter-attacks near Troyon cost the gallant First Division many casualties.

The casualties of the R.A.M.C. of the First Division were extraordinarily light, a remarkable fact considering the shell-fire the units endured. But the curious formation of the ground undoubtedly assisted in this happy result, as it provided shelter, to which numerous natural caves and a few quarries lent further opportunities to escape the shells and splinters. The records show that one officer, Lieutenant Crockett, medical officer in charge Cameron Highlanders, and two R.A.M.C. men were killed.

# CHAPTER XVI

Second Division operations—Medical arrangements—The advanced dressing stations—Severe shelling—Lieut.-Colonel O. Dalton, R.A.M.C., mortally wounded—Gallant conduct of the bearers—An eye-witness's description—Medical units under shell-fire—The Château Soupir—Casualties of the Second Division—R.A.M.C. casualties—Gallant conduct of Lieutenant Huggan, R.A.M.C., Captain Ranken, and others.

The crossing of the Aisne by the three infantry brigades of the Second Division on the 14th September was a more difficult operation than that of the First Division, which, as stated, gained the northern bank without other opposition than that afforded by enemy artillery. Shell-fire of like degree met the approach to the southern bank of the Second Division columns, which found the bridge at Pont Arcy down, and the farther bank, particularly towards Chavonne, in which direction the 4th Guards Brigade headed, held by strong forces of the enemy and numerous machine-guns. The crossing was therefore delayed, though some of the men of the 5th Infantry Brigade pushed their way impetuously to the northern bank across one of the broken girders of the bridge. Some time later a pontoon was thrown, enabling the remainder of the 5th Infantry Brigade, and the 6th, to effect a crossing.

Meanwhile the Guards Brigade had been held up opposite Chavonne. Here, in spite of machine-gun fire, men won the farther bank, being ferried across in a boat. At 5 P.M. the crossing was cleared, and presently the advance guard was over. At night, outposts of the 5th Brigade were at Verneuil and Beaulne, linking up with those of the First Division, and on the following night the Second Division held a line extending from

Beaulne south-west to La Cœur and Soupir, and thence to Chavonne. Advance was no longer possible. The line had been won only after strenuous fighting, ill-supported by artillery owing to the enclosed and wooded nature of the country. German counter-attacks were numerous and casualties heavy. This line, in fact, was not advanced during the Aisne operations, and, indeed, in the early days was gravely threatened, particularly on the left between Chavonne and Soupir, where, about noon of the 14th, the 1st and 2nd Cavalry Brigades were sent from the extreme right of the First Division to reinforce the left flank of the Second, and hold what was a position of vital importance.

Medical arrangements for the Second Division were adequate, and, considering all the difficulties—which will be better appreciated by perusal of the narrative of the doings of the various field ambulances—were effective in dealing rapidly with the large number of wounded who soon thronged the dressing stations. These comprised an advanced dressing station in some caves near Chivy, another near Moussy, and two main dressing stations, one at Verneuil and the second at the Château de Soupir. At L'Hôpital, on the southern bank of the river, close to Vieil Arcy, there was a divisional collecting station, to which all the lighter wounded were transported.

This bare statement of the general medical arrangements for the division in question gives no idea of the precise nature of the work of the R.A.M.C. behind the Second Division, and, so far, no details of the precarious, not to say dangerous and difficult circumstances in which the wounded were attended. As in the case of the other units of the First Corps, it was shell-fire which mainly troubled and rendered arduous the work of the medical units. Toward the front, regimental medical officers and bearers had a big share of it, while bearers of the field ambulances searching the slopes of the rising ground behind the front carried out their work under an unceasing rain of missiles. Every road was a mark for

German gunners; every green slope which offered a path to the dressing stations for stretcher-bearers was splashed with shrapnel, and the numerous woods in which shelter might have been sought were searched with shell or machine-gun fire. The situation was even more exacting behind the front. At the Château at Verneuil conditions were more difficult than at that of Soupir. Both were freely shelled, though not deliberately in the case of the Château at Verneuil, as the A.D.M.S. of the division takes pains to explain. Some of our batteries were near, and the shelling was counter-battery work, part of recognised warfare.

From these two main dressing stations to the river and thence to L'Hôpital, roads and bridges were shelled intermittently, but so heavily that evacuation—which in the case of the First Division was an extremely difficult problem—became in that of the Second Division an impossibility during daylight, simply and solely because of shelling. Evacuation at that period was prohibited, and at night only did convoys of ambulance wagons with double teams creak over the roads and bridges toward the divisional collecting station.

It is a simple matter to sketch the movements of individual medical units of the Second Division. With the brigades as they crossed the river went the regimental medical officers and the regimental bearers. Then came the 5th and 6th Field Ambulances, the former crossing at Pont Arcy at 11 A.M., for here the 5th Infantry Brigade had forced its way over the shattered girders of the bridge and cleared the opposite bank, permitting the pontoon to be thrown. The bearer division was now marched north, and by 1.30 P.M. was at Verneuil, where a dressing station was opened. Wounded were swarming in, some coming afoot, others carried by the bearers, so that very soon the Château—a large building—and a stable of liberal dimensions were filled. Assistance was urgently required, and this the tent division brought, marching in and relieving the bearers. Amongst the numerous wounded, of which 9 officers and 166 other

ranks British and 54 Germans were admitted during the day, was Lieut.-Colonel Dalton, the recently appointed A.D.M.S. of the division.

Officers of the medical service who had so far filled the office in question had met with a chapter of misfortunes. When the British Expeditionary Force sailed to France, Colonel H. N. Thompson, D.S.O., was A.D.M.S. of the division, and it is to his notes that we are indebted for the information we have with regard to the Mons fighting. Then his diary comes to a tragically sudden end, for he was captured at Maroilles, and indeed remained a prisoner for some months before the Germans released him. He was succeeded during the remainder of the retreat by Lieut.-Colonel R. J. Copeland of the 5th Field Ambulance, and on the 8th September by Lieut.-Colonel O. Dalton, who was sent up from No. 1 General Hospital to fill the vacant position. That same shell-fire which troubled the bearers so much and had already accounted for some of the R.A.M.C. now struck down this promising officer: a high-explosive shell bursting near him as he was carrying wounded into Verneuil Château and wounding him severely. Eye-witnesses of the occurrence say that immediately after receiving his wound Lieut.-Colonel Dalton was further injured by a gun limber, the horses attached to which bolted when the shell burst. In any case his injuries were of a grave nature. That fact and continuous shelling of Verneuil made it desirable to move him, and at night he was taken to L'Hôpital, where the end came. It was under heavy shell-fire again that his brothers of the R.A.M.C. laid him to rest in the village churchyard at Vieil Arcy. A cross marks the grave of this very gallant Irish officer.

The bearer division of the 6th Field Ambulance joined that of the 5th at the Château at Verneuil about noon of the 14th and was followed by its tent division, so that as night fell there was the personnel of two complete medical units present in the Château, and two complete bearer divisions searching the slopes and woods

as far as the firing-line. These officers and men continued working at high pressure throughout the night of the 14th–15th, and still had their hands full on the 15th and following days. Seven officers and eighty-five other ranks wounded were admitted during the course of the 15th, making a total admitted to the main dressing station at Verneuil of 321.

Those were strenuous days for all ranks, and it is not wonderful, therefore, that records are none too complete. Yet incidents showing the devotion of the R.A.M.C. are not wanting in the notes supplied in officers' diaries. Major Bostock of No. 5 Field Ambulance, who was acting as D.A.D.M.S. Second Division, and was with Lieut.-Colonel Dalton when the latter was wounded, writes of the bearers as follows:

> The bearer subdivisions were out all night (14th/15th) collecting wounded, and did excellent work, the conduct of some of them being specially mentioned by the officer commanding 49th Battery, Royal Field Artillery, who spoke of the courageous conduct at Pont Arcy of Privates S. Hodgert and W. Richens and Lance-Corporal J. Jonas, stating that they carried a sergeant of his under very heavy fire, holding his severed artery, and in his opinion were very brave and saved his life.

It is the duty of the R.A.M.C. to save life, so that these men needed no commendation for that portion of the exploit; but their devotion to a stricken comrade is well worth recording, since it is only one of numerous instances when the non-commissioned ranks of the R.A.M.C. have displayed conduct approaching heroism. Lance-Corporal J. Jonas was subsequently decorated with the D.C.M. for this fine performance, and Privates S. Hodgert and W. Richens, all of the R.A.M.C., received the honour of a mention in despatches.

The main dressing station at Verneuil had by now fulfilled its purpose. It was very exposed, had been freely shelled, and on the 17th received a direct hit. It was decided to reduce it to the status of an advanced dressing station, and that night No. 6 Field Ambulance moved out with all but forty of the wounded, using

nine ambulance wagons and twenty-four G.S. wagons. Thus No. 5 Field Ambulance was left in sole charge of Verneuil, while L'Hôpital was reinforced by No. 6, and was the better able to deal with evacuation. Still it was not entirely suitable, so that on the 20th the divisional collecting station was moved to Vieil Arcy, where the church and school and certain houses were prepared for patients.

Before leaving Verneuil one incident related by an eye-witness may prove of interest. Shells were dropping near, and the windows of the Château—those that still survived—shook and rattled as bursts occurred. The work of the dressing station, however, went on steadily. Wounded were brought to the entrance, where their descriptions were carefully entered. They were then carried to the "wards," and their injuries examined and treated. In one room surgical operations were in progress. Orderlies hovered about the operation table, sterilising instruments and awaiting the wishes of the surgeon who bent over his patient. The anæsthetist bent to listen to the breathing of the wounded man, and methodically dripped chloroform from his bottle on to the mask which covered the patient's face. A shell burst near. Then came the direct hit already recorded. It smashed through the Château, shrieked across the operation room, and plunged through the mirror hanging over the salon fireplace. Orderlies still hovered around. Instruments were lifted carefully from the steriliser. The anæsthetist looked round at the mirror and again dripped chloroform. He lifted the eyelid of his unconscious patient, grunted his satisfaction, and again bent to listen to his breathing. The operating surgeon had not even raised his head. His busy fingers played about the wound, one hand grasped the scalpel. He proceeded without undue haste, then beckoned for dressings. Finally, as the patient was lifted from the table he turned and examined the mirror. "Broken it, eh?" he observed; "that's bad luck for the Germans!"

The Château at Soupir had not yet been occupied

by the R.A.M.C. as a main dressing station, though the light section of No. 3 Cavalry Field Ambulance had moved into it on the 14th, when two cavalry brigades reinforced the left flank of the Second Division.

This detachment was joined on the 16th by No. 4 Field Ambulance, which left one medical officer and a detachment at L'Hôpital Farm, to act as a divisional collecting station, and marched by way of Bourg to Soupir, arriving after darkness had fallen. It at once took over the very roomy, not to say elaborate stabling, and sent out its bearer division, which returned some hours later with 165 wounded. On the following day the 4th Field Ambulance moved into the Château.

Meanwhile the main portion of the 3rd Cavalry Field Ambulance had had a somewhat exciting experience. It crossed on the 15th to the left flank of the First Corps to work behind the 1st and 2nd Cavalry Brigades, and took up its position near the Château, where, as before mentioned, a dressing station was already opened by its light section.

Its arrival coincided with a sudden outburst of enemy shelling; one high-explosive shell falling amongst a group of men and horses quite close to the ambulance. Of these, thirteen men became casualties, one being killed outright, and four dying very shortly afterwards, while many of the horses were killed. So heavy was the firing that the ambulance had to withdraw hastily, and reaching the river, was presently driven to the south of it. As it went over the bridge it must have caught the eye of a German observation officer, for there came a renewed outburst of firing, and as the ambulance wagons moved across the open plain towards Vieil Arcy, shells followed all the way, one exploding so close that many of the personnel were knocked over. This resulted in the death of one of the R.A.M.C. Nothing daunted, the cavalry field ambulance crossed the river on the following day, the 16th, and once more made for the

Château, going this time by way of Chavonne, where it was again in the firing-line and subjected to severe shell-fire. Retiring east, it gained the Château, to find there the light section of the unit and some 200 wounded mostly from infantry battalions. This portion had in fact been at Soupir since the 14th, and so many cases had come into the place that already the supply of dressings was running short. However, the ambulance was able to make good the deficiency and also to render assistance by way of medical officers.

The Château of Soupir stood in a more or less open space, a building of pretentious proportions and of modern construction. In front of it were gardens, which no doubt in those days were well tended and beautiful enough. To the west of the mansion was a row of stone buildings which formed the stables. They were two-story buildings, and might well have been mistaken for the mansion itself, so ornate were they. This was true in 1917. To-day in 1918 another incursion of the Germans has undoubtedly wrought further damage. But in 1917, though shells had beaten in the top floors of the Château, which gaped roofless to the sky, the stables and the surroundings suffered more by neglect than by active warfare.

In September 1914 the place was as yet hardly touched, and the salons and the corridors and the cellars were crammed with British wounded. Not that Soupir was too safe a spot in those days : far from it. As the main portion of the 3rd Cavalry Field Ambulance again left the spot soon after mid-day, shells were dropping about the Château. A single exploding missile killed two and wounded four, the latter being collected under heavy shell-fire by Lieutenants H. B. Owens, T. O. Graham, and J. H. Ward, and Staff-Sergeants Bush and O'Rourke of the unit in question, who gallantly went to their assistance, themselves narrowly escaping a large high-explosive shell which dropped near them. Amongst the wounded was one man whose hand was almost severed, so that there and then, in the open and under

shell-fire, the amputation was completed, and all the wounded dressed and loaded in the ambulance wagons. The main portion of the 3rd Cavalry Field Ambulance now moved back to Œuilly, from which the tent division of No. 2 Field Ambulance had been driven on the 14th, taking 105 wounded from the Château. At Œuilly they occupied the church, and having laid hay on the floor, admitted all their wounded. Not until 4 A.M. on the 17th could they rest, and at six o'clock they were again at work dressing further wounded. These were later on sent across the river to Villers, where the motor ambulances lent by the French were then clearing our dressing stations.

Three days later this cavalry field ambulance was ordered to the southern bank of the river, where it opened a main dressing station in a house next to the *sucrerie* occupied by No. 2 Field Ambulance, which still operated as a divisional collecting station for the First Division. On the 20th, when German attacks were launched upon the right of that division, where it joined hands with the French, and cavalry were sent up to reinforce and go into the trenches, the cavalry field ambulance in question sent a detachment to Tour de Paissy to open an advanced dressing station. Thus, at this period it had begun to operate anew behind the First Division, and had now withdrawn entirely from the Second Divisional area, for the cavalry brigades there had been relieved by a brigade of the newly arrived Sixth Division.

The 4th Field Ambulance worked on alone at the Château at Soupir, once the light section of the 3rd Cavalry Field Ambulance had been withdrawn, and though at first it had numerous wounded to deal with, the 20th saw its labours lightened considerably. After the 20th, in fact, wounded of both the First and Second Divisions showed a remarkable falling off, due to a lull in the fighting. Sickness, however, was more prevalent. As might be expected, the terrible weather experienced in the middle of September and throughout the initial

Aisne operations had tried the men severely. Yet, speaking generally, the health of the troops was and had been excellent, though a few cases of enteric fever, which for the first time made its appearance, gave rise to fears of an epidemic.

Casualties of the Second Division during the period 14th–20th were on a large scale. Thirty-nine officers and 281 other ranks were killed, and a few officers and 958 other ranks were missing. The bearers brought into Verneuil no fewer than 68 officers and 1297 other ranks wounded, all of whom were transferred in due course first to L'Hôpital and thence to Braisne.

Casualties of the R.A.M.C. are, unfortunately, not faithfully recorded. Lieutenant-Colonel Dalton, the A.D.M.S., was dangerously wounded, as set forth earlier. Lieutenant Huggan, already famous as an International Rugby football player, the medical officer of the 3rd Coldstream Guards, was killed on the 15th. The death of this gallant R.A.M.C. officer brings to light an act of bravery which—four years after the onset of the war—makes one proud because of British magnanimity. It was not British wounded who were Lieutenant Huggan's chief concern at the moment of his death, but German. They were in a barn—some fifty of them—which German shells set flaring. Lieutenant Huggan, amongst others, rescued every one of them and carried them into a quarry. There a shell fell a little later, killing Lieutenant Huggan and three other officers and a number of men. They lie side by side not so far from Soupir. On the same day, Lieutenant Watson of the 6th Field Ambulance was severely wounded. On the 18th, Captain H. S. Ranken, the medical officer of the 1st King's Royal Rifles, 6th Infantry Brigade, was severely wounded, his thigh and leg being shattered by a shell. Yet he refused to leave the trenches; refused even to cease from treating the wounded, and continued to do so till the bearers carried him away to the dressing station. Nor were the trenches below the Chemin des Dames the only spot where this gallant

officer had displayed conspicuous devotion to duty. At Hautevesnes on the 9th, during the action which practically ended the Marne operations, he had attracted the attention of his brother officers and the men by his indifference to danger, and by the manner in which he exposed himself to rifle and shell fire in the effort to treat the wounded. Unfortunately his wound was a very severe one. He bore the shock of amputation splendidly. Never once did he grumble at the ill-fortune which had come along so soon after the opening of the campaign. Cigarette in mouth, he bade a smiling farewell to his friends as he was carried across the platform at Braisne station some few days later, and was transferred to an ambulance train. That was the last they saw of him, smiling, plucky, and cheerful. He died of embolism a few hours later. Yet his memory survives. The deed for which he deservedly obtained mention in despatches, and which led directly to his death, was rewarded by a posthumous V.C. Our French Ally, who can appreciate a brave man and value devotion to duty as well as can any, conferred upon him the Legion of Honour.

Finally, on the 20th, Lieutenant J. F. O'Connell, medical officer of the 2nd Highland Light Infantry, and on the 26th, Lieutenant W. O. W. Ball, medical officer in charge 2nd S. Staffs Regiment, were killed in action; on the 18th also, Lieutenant E. R. Walker, R.A.M.C., No. 6 Field Ambulance, was wounded, making a total of medical officers, conjoined with those of the First Division, so large in proportion to the numbers employed that the advisability of permitting regimental medical officers to go into the trenches came under serious discussion. Orders were, in point of fact, issued to the effect that they should remain in their Regimental Aid Posts, and were obeyed to some extent. Yet there are frequent occasions when the presence of a medical officer in the front line trenches is a matter of urgency, even in the height of an action. Nor, as events have proved, is his risk remarkably less in the regimental

aid post prepared for each battalion medical officer. Every variety of missile can reach him there, except, perhaps, a hand grenade. Shelling of regimental aid posts has accounted for numerous casualties amongst the R.A.M.C. since this Aisne order was issued.

# CHAPTER XVII

Vailly and its surroundings—Operations of the 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades and of the Third Division—The 5th Cavalry Field Ambulance heavily shelled—Death of Captain F. Forrest—Distribution of Third Division Field Ambulances—Heavy shelling—Conditions in Chassemy—Direct hits upon two British Medical units—Description of Chassemy—The township of Vailly—The church as a dressing station—Buried treasure—Women under fire—R.A.M.C. casualties.

Vailly lies on the northern bank of the River Aisne, where the valley, narrowed by the approach of slopes north and south, suddenly opens out toward the west, presenting on the south side a green depression through which runs the Vesle to join the Aisne a little west of Vailly. Farther west is a ridge, wooded and wind-swept, which encloses the vale of the Vesle on the south-west and stretches from Sermoise—even now a picturesque place, though totally ruined—to Lime, a little south of Braisne. Sermoise has looked on at the struggle across the placid bosom of the Aisne these months past. A long, single street of stone-built houses, its once beautiful church overshadowing it from a central position, it was in September 1917 a tumbled wreck of masonry, of roofless cottages and homesteads over which the cracked belfry of the Norman tower gaped, wind and rain free to enter to the very heart of this sacred edifice. At its foot, nestling against its very walls, tended by the gentle hands of the gallant poilu, were British graves, graves of the men of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade or of the Third Division, whose objective on the 13th September 1914 was the town of Vailly over the way, and the heights leading up towards the Chemin des Dames.

Chassemy, a charming village of no mean size, looks

down upon Sermoise from a long bluff of green which encroaches upon the green valley of the Vesle, and which forms, as it were, the southern rampart of the Aisne valley where it opens out, and the end of the ridge stretching from the neighbourhood of Bazoches along the eastern edge of the basin where runs the Vesle. Brenelle lies behind it. Farther south, in the vale itself, is Braisne, a town of no great size, sheltered to some extent from enemy observation by the ridge described. Over the way, capping the ridge across the vale, Ciry, Chassemy, and other hamlets and farms show up amidst the all-pervading green, with Serches to the west of them.

Almost all these townships have some connection with the British Expeditionary Force. In more than one enemy shells brought death or wounds to men of the R.A.M.C. To be in the firing-line tending wounded in the height of an action is one thing ; it brings wounds and death, but has its compensations ; to work in comparatively peaceful surroundings in the schoolhouse of such a charming spot as Chassemy, in a room cleared of all furniture, swept, and hurriedly garnished, with surgical panniers wide open and vomiting their contents, an operating table in the centre, and in an adjacent room wounded men who must be attended, and others constantly arriving—that again with shells tumbling in upon the spot—is another side of the R.A.M.C. question. Yet the work went on in September 1914, and has done ever since. There have been times without number when the crash of shells was as nothing to the terrible weariness of the struggle. All those wounded men silently awaiting attention ; not a grumble, not a cry from them, yet their necessity clearer to the officers and men of the R.A.M.C. than to the wounded themselves. The struggle began maybe as an autumn sun lifted above the valley. It has continued the day long until lamps illuminate the interior of the dressing station. Still wounded pour in, and the surgeons and their assistants work on till the rising sun heralds another

day. Outside there is the creak of wagon wheels, more wounded come, and once again the R.A.M.C. officers and men look to their patients, treat them, feed them, and finally dispose of them so as to make room for others.

In Braisne, in Chassemy, in Serches, and elsewhere this was the condition of affairs. The narrative of R.A.M.C. doings on the Aisne yet to be recorded will disclose scenes such as have been crudely sketched, while at Chassemy severe shell-fire added to the difficulties of the service. Serches, too, bears the mark of enemy shells to this day, and the grave of at least one gallant R.A.M.C. officer can be found close to it, where he was buried in haste, with shells still falling, close to the spot where he was struck down.

Early on the morning of the 13th September the 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades rode down to the bridge which spans the Aisne opposite Vailly. They found the opposite bank held in force, and moved off at once so as to permit the infantry to deal with the opposing enemy. The 8th and 9th Infantry Brigades of the Third Division —the same which had held the salient at Mons and had fought so magnificently at Le Cateau—marched from their billets *via* Chassemy, and so dropped down towards the river. From the opposite heights they could be easily viewed, for the slopes about Vailly and the Chemin des Dames look down upon and almost into Chassemy, while the two gullies which enter the Aisne valley to right and left of Vailly, descending from Jouy and Aizy on the one hand, and Ostel on the other, give ample shelter for hostile troops. Thus it followed that the column and the bearers came in for heavy shelling. Then, the bank reached, and the bridge found with one of its arches shattered, the men of the 8th and 9th Brigades flung a plank across it, and with bullets singing about their ears, and shells splashing into the water, forced their way to the northern bank, and so to Vailly and to the slopes beyond.

Viewed to-day the terrain offers little encouragement

for an attacking force, and in September 1914 it was no different. The wonder is that men crossed the river at all, particularly as they were so indifferently supported by artillery. Rather is it remarkable that they were not swept away wholesale as they dropped down from Chassemy into the flats below and under the muzzles of German marksmen. Their want of success on the far bank is no more astonishing. Vailly and the slopes to the north offer every opportunity to a determined enemy, for everywhere the Germans occupied high ground that dominated the attackers' position. The history of the Third Division discloses an impetuous attack, some ground gained, but failure to seize the highest ridges. Afterwards there was no appreciable advance during the first phase of the Aisne operations, and presently much hard fighting was necessary to break the numerous counter-attacks the enemy flung against the division.

Cavalry field ambulances provide the first item of historical interest in connection with the Third Division operations, and were the first of the medical units working in its immediate neighbourhood to experience the effects of enemy shell-fire. Not, it should be remarked, that cavalry field ambulances and other medical units had not already come under enemy artillery. Mons was no exception. It was more intense at Le Cateau. At the crossing of the Morin and Marne Rivers there was more. But not so many high-explosive shells as now crashed about them. These "Black Marias," "Coal Boxes," "Jack Johnsons," and other missiles, which quickly earned their own particular sobriquets, were not so much in evidence before the Aisne operations, and then they were as plentiful almost as blackberries.

As the 5th Cavalry Field Ambulance marched from Ciry on the 13th September along the road to Serches, its column was picked up by enemy observers. It was then 10 A.M., and very soon shells were following its movements. It wended its way slowly up the hilly road which leads to the summit of the ridge, and probably

became an even better mark for gunners. High-explosive shells began to fall, and one put out of action two of its officers and a lance-corporal. The column halted while a dressing station was opened in some caves. Then it went on painfully to Serches, and so to Mont de Soissons Farm, carrying the body of one R.A.M.C. officer and the two who had survived their wounds. Captain F. Forrest was buried that afternoon where the cavalry field ambulance halted, and doubtless the grave will become a wayside mark for future generations. Let us suggest an epitaph for the sympathetic consideration of our gallant Ally :

> Here lies the body of Captain F. Forrest, of the British Medical Service, who nobly gave his life in the effort to succour wounded. He died that liberty and honour, the birthright of France and England, might continue.

Lieutenant E. J. Wyler and the lance-corporal were taken on to Braisne in the evening.

On the following day the ambulance had a further experience. It followed the cavalry by way of Chassemy and gained the neighbourhood of Vailly. Then shelling began. It retired, but shells followed it. It gained the outskirts of Chassemy and sought shelter in a wood, but was driven out, and was shelled as it pushed on past the château and village of Chassemy. Only in Braisne did it enjoy a respite. It billeted there, and sent out Lieutenant L. W. O. Taylor with a light section to collect wounded.

The fortunes of No. 2 Cavalry Field Ambulance are intermingled with those of one of the field ambulances of the Third Division. All three medical units of the latter had reached Braisne in the pouring rain on the night of the 12th. On the following day the 9th Field Ambulance assisted in caring for wounded already arriving in the French Red Cross Hospital in the town, and sent one of its bearer subdivisions towards the river with orders to get in touch with the 9th Infantry Brigade.

The 8th opened a dressing station on the road to Chassemy about half-way between it and Braisne. Two of its bearer subdivisions went forward, and these were followed by a small detachment with which went Major G. T. K. Maurice, officer commanding the field ambulance, and Captain Darling. It was this adventurous party which, as mentioned earlier, came under shell-fire, and for three hours remained pinned to the point they had gained, counting during that comparatively short interval the fall of no fewer than 350 high-explosive shells, all in their immediate neighbourhood. If an illustration were sought to demonstrate to the uninitiated what are the difficulties confronting the R.A.M.C., here is one, as realistic as need be.

Ultimately the whole unit parked for the night just to the south of Chassemy. It had, as a matter of fact, been ordered to move into the village, but the officer commanding had noted the exposed position of the place and the probability of its being shelled, and using his discretion, halted beyond it. How fortunate and far-seeing was this decision is shown by the misfortunes of the 7th Field Ambulance.

It was raining in torrents when this unit marched into Chassemy on the 14th. It at once opened a dressing station in the school and made ready for wounded. Two of its bearer subdivisions went meanwhile in command of Captain M'Queen to the bridge, and gained Vailly. Presently a report was received in Chassemy that assistance was required in Vailly, where the bearers had found many wounded. On this, Major Fielding took the last of the bearer subdivisions down to the river, but found the bridge under such heavy shell-fire that he was driven off and forced to return with six wounded picked up close to the river. It was nearly mid-day, and shells were tumbling on to the ridge above, and all about Chassemy. Just about this time also the 3rd Cavalry Brigade was moving back from the river, where it had attempted to cross by the pontoon thrown by the Royal Engineers on the 13th, and completed during the night.

It, too, was driven back to the neighbourhood of the château, which lies beside the road to Vailly, and with it the light section of the 2nd Cavalry Field Ambulance. "Black Marias" and "Jack Johnsons" followed the column up the hill and plunged amongst horses and men near the château. Three burst close to the ambulance wagons. Men in front and behind the section of the cavalry field ambulance were killed. The place was clearly enough untenable, and was evacuated, the section of the cavalry field ambulance moving to dead ground south of the village not far from the 8th Field Ambulance. Even there shells were falling. Here is the statement made by the officer commanding No. 8 Field Ambulance:

> Severe shell-fire. Men made to shelter under the edge of a wood. Horses distributed and men lay down holding them. Two horses slightly wounded.

One officer, Lieutenant Bazett, also received slight wounds.

The main portion of the cavalry field ambulance had not accompanied the cavalry brigade to the river. It was in billets in Chassemy, close to the 7th Field Ambulance, and had opened a dressing station. Then shelling began. The schoolhouse dressing station was hit direct, three of the R.A.M.C. being killed by the explosion. The enemy obtained in all eighteen direct hits upon the two medical units. More men were hurt. The buildings around were demolished, and for a time there was chaos. "The place resembled a shambles," says Major Langford Lloyd, D.S.O., who was with the light section of the cavalry field ambulance, and now came into Chassemy to see what was happening to the main portion of his unit. Possibly it did, for the cavalry field ambulance had three men wounded, twelve horses killed, and one heavy ambulance wagon wrecked. No. 7 Field Ambulance had four R.A.M.C. and one A.S.C. driver killed, and six R.A.M.C. wounded. Nine horses were killed, and two of its carts reduced to matchwood.

One would almost expect, seeing the severity of the

above experience, that both field ambulances would have decamped promptly. No. 2 Cavalry Field Ambulance did, being ordered to Braisne. But No. 7 had patients to think of, and it says much for the discipline of the R.A.M.C. that, despite shelling, the unit remained in Chassemy till 4 P.M., when, its thirty wounded dressed and comfortably loaded in the ambulance wagons, it marched out of the place. Even then it came in for more shelling as it marched to Braisne.

Chassemy does not altogether disappear from the narrative yet. It seemed to attract the officer commanding the 2nd Cavalry Field Ambulance and his light section. It was still being shelled when they returned in the late afternoon, and shells were falling as they searched the surroundings for wounded. No fewer than thirty-five were found and carried back to Braisne.

Before leaving Chassemy the place deserves a little further description. It stands, as already stated, on the summit of a bluff projecting westward from the ridge which bounds the valley of the Vesle, and, like the numerous villages and towns along this stretch of the Aisne, presents a number of stone-built houses. Its ancient church occupies almost the central part, and near at hand is a species of " Petit Place " with a shady avenue of trees dotted along it. Quite closely adjacent is the schoolhouse, or rather all that is left of it, for indeed this pleasant little place is now a wreck, though picturesque even in its ruin. In 1917 the old church still reared its battered tower above shattered ruins and broken roofs, and had provided in turn billets for British soldiers, and ever since those days of September 1914 for French poilus. Civilians were non-existent, for until quite recently the place was under observation from the plateau across which the Chemin des Dames runs its direct course, and German guns frequently paid attention to it. No doubt the conditions have again altered, and for the worse, for 1918 witnessed another German advance, resulting in further wreckage. But until about the end of 1917 the place was deserted but for soldiers.

Little evidence could be found then of its previous occupation by men of the British Expeditionary Force; but at least those who fell are not forgotten. Those men of the R.A.M.C., and the devoted Army Service Corps driver of the 7th Field Ambulance, lie buried side by side beneath one of the shady trees in the Petit Place, and round them the hand of the ever-gallant poilu has erected a stone enclosure, while crosses deck the heads of the graves and flowers rest upon them.

The cavalry field ambulances now retired from the immediate front, and about the 22nd September the 2nd and 4th and 5th were transferred to the 2nd Cavalry Division, then in process of formation.

No. 9 Field Ambulance left a detachment working in the Red Cross Hospital in Braisne, and another at Brenelle to guard its heavy transport. Then two bearer subdivisions and two tent subdivisions marched to the pontoon opposite Vailly, only to find the approaches impossible. But they got over the permanent bridge and collected numbers of wounded. Toward midnight they were under heavy fire at the moment when the Germans launched a strong attack on the 9th Infantry Brigade. Then, having filled their ambulance wagons, they crossed to the southern bank and reached Braisne early on the 15th.

The 8th Field Ambulance bivouacked in the open, south of Chassemy, and when darkness fell, sent bearers to assist the bearer party of No. 7 Field Ambulance, now north-east of Chassemy. Here one of the bearers was killed. At 2 A.M. on the 15th the bearers crossed to Vailly, while the main portion of No. 8 Field Ambulance marched to Braisne, and there opened a dressing station near the railway station.

The 7th Field Ambulance, now safely out of Chassemy, sent one bearer subdivision with three ambulance wagons across the river at 2.30 A.M. on the 15th, and with it one tent subdivision, which opened a dressing station. Another tent subdivision opened in a mill, the Moulins des Pret, three kilomètres along the road to Braisne,

while the remainder of the unit went to the bridge at Vailly, and having collected wounded marched to Braisne. In this town was the nodal point, where wounded of the First and Second and Third Divisions received attention once they had been cleared from the front, whence they were sent back along the lines of communication. Here, then, the members of the 7th Field Ambulance who had collected the wounded from the Vailly Bridge opened a hospital.

Beyond Vailly, less than half-a-mile away, was the Third Division. Vailly itself is a delightful old-world place. No more graceful town could be imagined, for what with its stone houses, moss grown and clad with lichens, its roofs, few now in evidence, toned down by time and weather to harmonise with their surroundings, the woodlands all about, the heights beyond and the adjacent river, the town with its full southern aspect, and Chassemy perched before it, was in 1914 something on which the eye dwelt with unusual pleasure.

On the night of the 14th–15th September its streets were silent and deserted, save for distant shelling and the rattle of rifles; the few unfortunate inhabitants who still remained cowered in their dwellings. Major R. L. V. Foster, in charge of the bearers of the 8th Field Ambulance, marched them up the main cobbled street, now girded by the shells of houses, some of them then in flames, till he reached the Place, on which the church looks, from either end of which roads make off up the gullies which seam the hillside. Pretentious houses—the walls now askew—looked down upon the Place, and into one of these the bearers forced an entrance. They were awakened at dawn by bullets smashing though the walls, and beat a hurried retreat to the church. Here they opened an advanced dressing station, and presently occupied the curé's house next door, an adjacent school, and Dr. Lancry's house, which latter was eminently suitable, having been constructed to act as a nursing home. With Major Foster were Lieutenants Robinson and Greenfield.

Less than forty-eight hours after the arrival of this bearer division, 500 wounded had been admitted to the dressing stations, the majority going to the church. Weather-beaten and oft-scourged ruins represent all that now remains of this once beautiful twelfth-century edifice, about the chequered history of which cling memories of the Maid of Orleans. Her memory is kept green by a chapel in the church dedicated to her. Here is Lieutenant Robinson's description of the building on the morning of 15th September :

> The scene inside that church was one which defies all description. It was a large church for the size of the town, and the whole of the floor space was covered with mattresses : we even had to put them on the altar steps. Wounded men, covered with mud and blood, were everywhere, and space was so precious that we could not even keep gangways through the rows of mattresses : to get to our patients we had to step over others. Many of the wounds were very serious. After dark the difficulty was to get the place lighted, but the curé—who was a charming old fellow, and intensely anxious to be helpful—himself gave us the thick wax candles off the altar.

Thanks to the position of the church the enemy had not yet shelled it, though the lower part of the town was becoming a crumbling ruin. All day long, however, bullets sang down the streets and shells flew over the church and Place and crashed into the houses. Bearing in mind all the conditions, but mainly the number of wounded, it is not surprising to discover that the three officers of the R.A.M.C. fighting this uphill battle secured practically no rest for the three days and nights they were in Vailly. Their men worked just as assiduously, while in the school a band of devoted Frenchwomen, fortunately trained in first-aid work, lent valuable assistance. So also did the curé.

There is a pathetic note in part of Lieutenant Robinson's diary. He went off down the street of the town, when the majority of the wounded had been dressed, to attend to two children who had been wounded. The fee pressed upon the British doctor by a grateful

mother was four eggs—a prize in those days. Returned to the church, he offered them first to this wounded man, then to a wounded officer near him, and so on to others, always to meet with a sheepish refusal. "Every one was quite sure that there was some one else who wanted an egg worse than he did." Eventually some wounded civilians gladly accepted the delicacies.

There were other incidents worthy of notice. Unfortunately amongst the many wounded some were so severely hurt that they died of wounds. The garden behind the doctor's house on the right of the road which climbs to the eastern gully was selected for the interment of these bodies, and after a while, in the course of preparing graves, the spades of the R.A.M.C. came upon buried treasure. It was the doctor's silver which he had hidden from the eyes of the invader. It was carefully covered up once more, and digging operations continued elsewhere.

As exemplifying the courage of Frenchwomen, the following may be recounted. Lieutenant Robinson was asked by a civilian to see a wounded inhabitant of the town. The woman led the way, the officer walking beside her.

> "As we went down the street a high-explosive shell burst about twenty yards in front of us, but the Frenchwoman took absolutely no notice of it, so we"—he and his bearers—"could hardly do less."

Those first forty-eight hours were the most strenuous for the R.A.M.C. in Vailly. They were overwhelmed with patients, and only by dint of continuous work were they able to attend all the wounded. After that casualties lessened, while shelling of the upper town became more constant. Having smashed the lower portion until it was a dust-heap, German gunners sent shells into the neighbourhood of the church. Three houses looking into the Place were destroyed, and fragments of shell fell at the entrance to the church, while bullets flattened against its stout twelfth-century walls, or

perforated its ancient windows. Yet only one R.A.M.C. orderly was wounded.

For the wounded, the church provided temporarily a moderately secure sanctuary, but numbers and the fear of overcrowding made it urgent to evacuate them whenever possible. Only at night could this be done, and then men who could walked to the pontoon, and others were borne on stretchers. Bearer divisions and ambulance wagons of the three field ambulances of the division rendezvoused every night after dark at the bridge and on the southern bank, and loading the cases took them to their dressing stations in Braisne. Sometimes the work was interfered with by shell-fire. About every quarter of an hour the Germans lobbed missiles in the neighbourhood of the bridge. But neither bearers nor patients were injured. Eleven officers and 238 other ranks were brought out of Vailly during the night 15th–16th, and 6 officers and 241 other ranks on the following night. Numbers dropped to 1 officer and 130 other ranks on the night 17th–18th, and to 71 other ranks on the next occasion of evacuation, but rose sharply to 10 officers and 232 other ranks on the night 20th–21st, falling again to 3 officers and 158 British other ranks and 12 Germans, and to 77 on the two succeeding nights. Vailly was then completely evacuated except for three men too desperately hurt to bear removal. Thereafter numbers lessened very appreciably, the acuteness of the struggle having subsided.

In Vailly itself the hard-worked trio of officers of the 8th Field Ambulance received some relief on the night of the 17th, two officers replacing Lieutenants Robinson and Greenfield. Major R. L. V. Foster was relieved on the 19th, having, according to his commanding officer who relieved him, "done splendid work." For this and previous work with the wounded he deservedly received a mention in the October 1914 despatches. Sergeant H. J. V. Voisey (then corporal), R.A.M.C., No. 8 Field Ambulance, was presented with the D.C.M. for his excellent work at Vailly and elsewhere. On the

21st No. 9 Field Ambulance relieved the bearers of No. 8 Field Ambulance, sending Major E. W. Bliss with two tent subdivisions and one bearer subdivision. They found only three desperately wounded British soldiers in the dressing station, with one German, of the Medical Corps, four French civilians, and two children, one of them a babe in arms. They discovered, too, that German shells were searching every cranny of the upper town. The church was struck four times, and was only just evacuated when a mass of wall crashed into its interior. All sick and wounded were now put into cellars, which were floored with straw. That night all who could bear removal were sent across the river, for shelling continued. Lieutenant Gooding of the R.A.M.C. was wounded in the street near by, and Staff-Sergeant Lamkin of the Ambulance gallantly went out in spite of the crashing shells and brought him in. A few hours later a woman was killed outside the dressing station. On the 24th the 16th Field Ambulance—Sixth Division—took over the dressing station at Vailly from the 9th Field Ambulance.

Casualties amongst the officers and men of the R.A.M.C. have been referred to as they are recorded in the various diaries. To them have to be added the names of Lieutenant A. K. Armstrong, medical officer of the 40th Brigade Royal Field Artillery, and Lieutenant H. L. Hopkins, medical officer in charge 1st Devons, who were killed in action, and of Captain Kempthorne, medical officer of the Lincoln Regiment, and Captain W. Mitchell, medical officer in charge 2nd Royal Scots, both reported missing. Lieutenant W. M. Howells and Lieutenant R. Fisher, who served in turn as medical officer to the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, were wounded.

# CHAPTER XVIII

Missy-sur-Aisne and the Aisne valley—Fifth Division operations—Medical arrangements—Casualties—The problem of evacuation—Mont de Soissons Farm—Field ambulance transport perilously inadequate—Arrival of motor ambulances—Feeding the wounded—R.A.M.C. losses.

Some four miles of valley and meadowland intervene between Vailly and Missy-sur-Aisne, where the Fifth Division was transferred to the far bank of the river. Viewed from the bluff whereon Chassemy stands, the Aisne can be seen as it emerges from between the hills at Vailly as through a gateway. Then it meanders across the flats to Condé, close to which point the Vesle, issuing from the valley leading from the Aisne to the little town of Braisne, joins it. The river has swung south-westward and continues in that direction to Missy, having Sermoise on its left bank and a range of irregular heights, with many a bulging headland, whereon are such places as Mézières, Jury, Serches, and farther west, Billy. Thence one looks across a wide wedge of marshland over the other side of the river which runs from Condé-sur-Aisne past Chivres, Missy-sur-Aisne, St. Marguerite, Bucy-le-Long, and so to Soissons. One sees, too, irregular heights rising from the very doors of the houses, seamed by gullies here and there, and clambering steeply till the summit is reached. There, on the sky-line, runs the Chemin des Dames, the main German position.

The 13th Infantry Brigade of the Fifth Division essayed the crossing at Missy on the morning of the 13th, but found the bridge broken. The 14th Infantry Brigade, however, made use of three rafts, and some

of the men went over in dashing manner. The remainder crossed at 1 P.M. on a pontoon thrown by the bridging section of the Royal Engineers, and marched straight into St. Marguerite. In the meanwhile the 15th Infantry Brigade moved west to the Moulin des Roches, and crossing another pontoon gained Missy. Here they covered approaches to the bridge upon which engineers were already working, and sent two battalions towards Chivres, where there was severe fighting. Farther along at Condé a strong enemy force held the crossing and the river front, and maintained a wedge between the right of the Fifth and the left of the Third Division at Vailly. It was a formidable position to attack: this force threatened the flanks of the two divisions, and so long as it remained there it gave material assistance to the attacks launched by the enemy at Chivres and at Vailly respectively. As a matter of fact it was not disturbed, partly because of the strong position the Germans had taken up, but mainly because a British success and an advance at Chivres or at Vailly would have threatened its communications and automatically forced its retirement. Such an advance did not take place, so that Condé was held to the end by enemy forces.

The history of the Fifth Division is linked with that of the Fourth. It held ground in front of the straggling line of houses which form Chivres, St. Marguerite, Bucy, and other places, and in the case of the troops near Chivres had strenuous work to retain its positions. The crossing and the initial advance were followed by half-hearted German counter-attacks. Fighting here was, indeed, precisely like that at Vailly: attack at first, some ground gained, but the objective not reached. Then the British line was subjected to numerous attacks, which in the majority of cases were beaten off with comparative ease, though at times not without an effort. The situation as regards the respective positions of the German and British troops in this area of the Aisne operations had not altered appreciably by the end of September, nor, in fact, up to the time of the withdrawal

of the Fifth Division and its replacement by French troops.

Serches was the point of rendezvous for the field ambulances of the division on the morning of the 13th, though as soon as the bearers had moved off with the fighting troops, one of the units advanced to Jury, on the way to the river, a second opening a dressing station at Ciry, which stands above the high road from Sermoise to Braisne. Thus as the operations developed and the bearers descended from the heights into the flats below, tent divisions made ready for wounded in three separate places. The arrangement was undoubtedly as good as could be imagined, for Missy and the pontoon to it lay opposite Sermoise, and a short climb to the ridge above brought ambulance wagons to the dressing station at Ciry. Wounded coming across from St. Marguerite or Bucy by way of the pontoon thrown near the old Mill des Roches were exactly opposite Mézières, whence a lane gave ready, if steep and difficult, access to Jury, where likewise a dressing station was in readiness. A rush of cases could be dealt with at Serches, where also the dressing stations at Jury and Ciry could send their cases in the event of heavy shelling.

Casualties of the Fifth Division on the 13th were sufficiently large to call for and justify extensive preparations on the part of its medical service. Five officers and 62 other ranks were killed, 11 and 560 other ranks wounded, and 106 men were missing. Thus a total of 16 officers and 728 other ranks casualties were suffered. The majority of these losses were encountered on the far side of the river, so that, bearing in mind the fact that the pontoons were required for the transit of troops in the first place, and that the return of vehicles or of bearers was out of the question, it is not surprising that few wounded reached the dressing stations on the 13th. Those that did were, with their bearers, subjected to shell-fire as they clambered to the heights toward Jury and Ciry, and so persistent and accurate did this fire become, particularly in the neighbourhood

of Serches, that two of the main bodies of the field ambulances there were ordered back to Mont de Soissons Farm, a mile south at the reverse foot of the heights, where there was excellent shelter. The 13th Field Ambulance, one of the two mentioned, returned to Serches towards evening.

Heavy shelling nearer the river greatly interfered with the work of the bearers on the 14th. The flats there could be enfiladed from the hills above Condé, and doubtless men and ambulance wagons were clearly visible to German gunners. Not that it is inferred that ambulance sections were deliberately fired on. Other units beside those of the medical service were on the road to Missy, and doubtless it was at these that enemy shells were directed. Bearers issuing from Ciry with four ambulance wagons were driven back behind the crest of the hills. Shells prevented bearers of the 15th Field Ambulance from reaching Missy, where 70 wounded were reported to be lying. Later the number had swollen to 120. It was then getting dark, and bearer parties at once pushed forward and crossed the pontoons. The division sent by the 15th Field Ambulance returned with a large number of wounded, and having brought their ambulance wagons to the heights above Mézières, selected a convenient farm beside the road, where a dressing station was opened. From this dressing station cases were sent back to Serches after day had dawned on the 15th. Meanwhile heavy shelling of the road between Serches and Ciry prevented bearers reaching Sermoise and the pontoon close to Missy Bridge. Here, too, it was not until after dusk that the men of the R.A.M.C. could get down to the river. They returned in the small hours of the 15th bringing seventy wounded, who were accommodated at the dressing station at Serches, where were collected the wounded from the other field ambulances, Serches having now been selected as the divisional collecting station. Bearers of the 15th Field Ambulance, which were still at Mont de Soissons Farm, also crossed

the river at nightfall, and marched through Missy toward the regimental aid posts, "a dangerous piece of work," says the officer commanding; and he was no indifferent judge, seeing that he had been in the thick of it at Le Cateau. However, the bearers discovered shelter, and remained in the neighbourhood of Missy during the whole night. At dawn of the 15th they emerged from the place and ran the gauntlet of falling shells, successfully transporting 110 casualties in their ambulance wagons, though one of the ambulance wagons was wrecked during the journey.

For this distinctly valuable operation Major S. G. Butler, R.A.M.C., who commanded the bearers and to whose initiative and staunchness such excellent results were due, was soon afterwards mentioned in despatches and was awarded the D.S.O.

Evacuation of the dressing stations had meanwhile engaged the attention of the A.D.M.S., who appears to have been unusually successful in his requisition of motor lorries. These rendezvoused at the cross-roads just south of Mont de Soissons Farm, whither field ambulances sent the wounded in their ambulance wagons.

The 15th September brought with it a change in the medical arrangements of the Fifth Division, but no diminution of the almost universal and certainly widespread shelling. Serches was reached by a steep ascent which tested the flagging strength of the ambulance wagon teams. The divisional collecting station was therefore transferred to Mont de Soissons Farm. Thus No. 13 Field Ambulance at Serches, instead of remaining the point of collection as formerly, now transferred its wounded direct to No. 15. From the divisional collecting station at Mont de Soissons Farm, No. 15 Field Ambulance sent off 2 officers and 194 other ranks wounded, these, like a previous batch, going down to the railhead at Fère-en-Tardenois. Braisne, the nearest point on the railway, would have been more easily reached providing there had been transport, and, moreover, there was an ambulance train there. But

no more motor lorries were then forthcoming, and for the time being wounded as they came in had to be accommodated in the divisional collecting station.

The position is one demanding close attention, for it illustrates the perilous inadequacy of field ambulance transport in September 1914. Yet the medical service was actually on the eve of an all-important change which was to make of it an essentially efficient service. Motor ambulances, so frequently referred to, arrived, as already stated, about the 20th September; and even the few supplied made a vast difference, not only to the comfort of the wounded but to the possibility of evacuation. Further and more detailed reference is made to them elsewhere, so that it only need be remarked at this stage that the motor ambulance and the motor ambulance convoy, which date from this stage, altered and vastly improved arrangements hitherto in force for the evacuation of wounded. One of the important items to bear in mind, too, is that this motor transport was, unlike the motor lorries hitherto placed at the service of the R.A.M.C., entirely at its command, so that no longer was it necessary to make requests to the divisional staff in the hope that transport would be forthcoming. It was on the spot, it belonged to the medical service, and it was for them to use absolutely at their discretion.

Cases continued to come into the dressing stations during the 16th, though there were not so many. Still 3 officers and 122 other ranks reached the 14th Field Ambulance near Jury, and in due course filtered back to Mont de Soissons Farm. The latter was a more commodious place, and by dint of improvisation and arrangement, at which R.A.M.C. officers are sufficiently expert, perhaps assisted in great part by their hospital training, "beds" were found for between 400 and 500 wounded. A barn here, floored with straw, an outhouse over the way with paillasses ranged along beside the walls, stretchers in the wash-house, more paillasses upstairs, and, thanks to the willing assistance of the farmer and his spouse, actual beds in one part of the

dwelling—real, comfortable beds for the very severe cases, for those who had needed operation, perhaps for the dying.

The provision of food in such a place as a divisional collecting station was no easy matter in September 1914. The fighting troops had the first call upon the energies of the Director of Supply and Transport. After these came troops in back areas. Field ambulances carry an amount of heavy equipment, including necessaries and "comforts" for sick and wounded, and extra rations whenever possible. But 500 wounded men soon absorb reserve rations. It should be observed, *en passant*, that hunger, acute hunger, is often enough a prominent symptom amongst the wounded. Nor is the fact remarkable. Their evacuation from the zone of actual fighting is a matter of danger and difficulty, and is frequently delayed for hours together. Shelling of the roads behind is another source of late arrival at the dressing stations. By then hunger, except in the case of the more severely wounded, is the predominant symptom, and after it, when the field ambulances have met the need, the call for sleep. The wounded gathered in any dressing station, once fed and dressed, are almost invariably sunk in blissful slumber. In the Farm of Mont de Soissons the wounded of the Fifth Division were fed as they came, thanks to the indefatigable work of the quartermaster, Lieutenant Buckley, who, finding his ration reserves exhausted, ransacked the neighbourhood, and secured sheep and other eatables.

There is little to record in connection with the further doings of the three medical units of the Fifth Division during the first phase of the Aisne operations, and there was no change in their disposition. No. 15 Field Ambulance continued to act as a divisional collecting station at Mont de Soissons Farm, and Nos. 13 and 14 Field Ambulances posted on the ridge went on nightly with the work of clearing wounded from the rear of the British position. Wagons creaked down to the flats every evening, when dusk had fallen, and bearers

tramped in silence to the repaired bridge or to the pontoons, some east of Missy to Chivres, others to the centre of the British position, and the remainder to Bucy-le-Long, where they were in touch with Fourth Division units.

Before dawn the wagons creaked back, over the river, across the flats, up the winding ascents from Mézières and Sermoise, and so to Jury or Ciry, and thence to Mont de Soissons Farm. From that point the welcome addition of the four motor ambulances which had arrived on the 20th to supplement the transport of the field ambulance now permitted evacuation to Braisne, which had long since become the busiest point, from the R.A.M.C. point of view, behind the Aisne front.

Those who in years to come would visit the scene of the Fifth Division operations should traverse the road which runs east from Soissons to Sermoise, and halt there to cast a glance at Condé across the river, and at Chassemy on the slopes above them. Then they should clamber to Ciry, or to Jury, as the fancy takes them, and look back over the valley. They will catch a glimpse, amidst the pervading green, of the straggling stone houses which constitute St. Marguerite, Bucy-le-Long, and other gentle spots nestling at the foot of the Aisne heights. Behind them is Serches. Below it, snug in its own hollow, is Mont de Soissons Farm, where British wounded were once tended, and where in the garden amidst the hollyhocks the reverent hands of the R.A.M.C. laid to rest those of their comrades who had fallen.

As in the case of the First Division, Fifth Division medical officers attached to battalions or to field ambulances went through the fighting at the Aisne with remarkable freedom from loss. Captain B. H. U. Dunbar, 1st Dorset Regiment, was wounded, and Lieutenant W. S. Danks, No. 14 Field Ambulance, was reported missing. These two appear to have been the only R.A.M.C. casualties.

# CHAPTER XIX

Fourth Division operations—R.A.M.C. operations much embarrassed by shell-fire—Transfer of ambulance wagons across Venizel Bridge—Bearers at the Front—The situation at Bucy-le-Long—The dressing station under fire—Intrepid conduct of the R.A.M.C.—Lessons taught on the Aisne—Tetanus—Gas gangrene—Enteric.

The Third Corps, which at the opening of the Aisne operations comprised the Fourth Division and the 19th Infantry Brigade, was the first unit of the British Expeditionary Force to reach the river as it approaches Soissons, and had the honour of setting foot upon the northern bank before its comrades of the Second and First Corps or of the Cavalry division had secured the bridges.

Ground about Braisne, Vieil Arcy, and Chassemy, leading to Bourg and Villers on the one hand, and to Vailly on the other, was being cleared of the enemy as the 10th Infantry Brigade of the Division, its advance guard on the 12th of September, secured the heights about Septmonts, and looked across the narrow valley which leads to the opposite heights, beyond which lies the river curling and twisting through the flats, squeezed, as it were, between that height and a third still farther north, on which was the German main position.

Facing the advance guard as it rested at Septmonts was the hamlet of Billy-sur-Aisne, perched on the opposite ridge, while below it lay scattered farmsteads leading to the bridge at Venizel. Far to the east, five miles away, was Serches, soon to be the divisional collecting station of the Fifth Division, and to the north-west Soissons.

The 11th Infantry Brigade pushed on to the river

as darkness fell, and finding the bridge just practicable, began to pass across it in single file, under shell-fire. A German demolition party had duly placed four charges on the bridge, and one of these had failed to explode, so that the tough ferro-concrete structure had survived.

It offered a precarious crossing, which the men of the 11th Infantry Brigade seized upon gladly. Thence they made their way across the flat meadow-land which fills the loop made by the river, and pushed outposts up towards the German position. The 10th and 12th Infantry Brigades remained on the south bank, the 19th Infantry Brigade bivouacking at Buzancy.

By the morning of the 13th, sappers had repaired the gap in Venizel Bridge, while a pontoon was in course of construction. Over the former, guns could now be manhandled, teams following, while the 12th Infantry Brigade moving across was soon in action near Chivres. The enemy was found in strength at Vregny, and to be holding spurs north of Bucy-le-Long leading to a point a quarter-mile east of Crouy, where the river bends sharply to Soissons. They were on high ground adjacent to St. Marguerite, and thence their line stretched to Chivres, opposite Missy-sur-Aisne, and so to Condé. Very early in the morning divisional cyclists seized the northern bridge-head at Missy, and though they were driven off about 4 A.M., the Fifth Division was then close, and was soon fighting on the right of the 12th Infantry Brigade, which meanwhile had attacked the western slopes below Chivres, and had won trenches. On the 15th the attack was pressed by the Fifth Division, and was followed by a certain amount of hostile enemy action directed against the 12th Infantry Brigade; this caused some casualties, our artillery units suffering considerably. Thereafter little alteration in the respective positions of the combatants took place. Enemy attacks were made during the succeeding days of this first phase of the Aisne operations, but they were not of the determined nature of those farther east, at Troyon,

for instance, or at Paissy. Artillery combats, sniping, and trench warfare succeeded the vigorous offensive of the Fourth Division on the 12th and 13th September.

For the medical service Venizel and its neighbourhood proved if not a death-trap, then a difficult and hazardous area in which to carry out its own particular operations. The collection of wounded from the battlefield has always been attended by some amount of personal risk to officers and men of a medical service. But risk had become at the outset an established feature of medical work in the war so recently opened. At Mons the R.A.M.C. had its first baptism of fire. At Le Cateau it experienced severe shelling. On the Marne its losses, though less, pointed to the hazardous nature of its calling. But on the Aisne the shell-fire it endured along the whole front was unprecedented in violence. Chassemy provided an example. Soupir had not been the most secure spot under the heavens. Now Bucy-le-Long and the picturesque St. Marguerite were to be associated with further examples.

The bearer subdivision of the 10th Field Ambulance, which went over the river with the 11th Infantry Brigade, had to endure continuous and heavy shell-fire, but refusing to be driven back, pushed right up into the village of Bucy-le-Long. British outposts were on the slopes and amidst the wooded hollows and gullies leading north to the closely adjacent German position. Other British troops were already "digging in" furiously so as to secure cover. Shells were crashing amidst the stone houses—those picturesque grey stone dwellings, picturesque, perhaps, even now after so many weary months of shelling—and bullets were flitting across the one main street. Like the infantry, the bearer subdivision sought shelter, and secured it in the girls' school, having selected it as a suitable place for the reception of wounded. Floors were cleansed, desks set aside, a fire lighted, and what little equipment had been brought—for no vehicle had yet been able to pass the trembling bridge—was set out and made ready. By then stretcher

squads had crept off under cover of the houses, up the narrow gullies, amongst the wooded covering of the slopes, seeking the regimental aid posts and the regimental medical officers, and collecting the wounded lying in the open.

At this spot, under an unceasing bombardment, the bearer subdivision remained through the night of the 12th–13th, and by early morning of the 13th had many wounded in the school-house. To these, others were added rapidly, till the place was becoming uncomfortably crowded. A message was now sent to the A.D.M.S. of the division, who about the same time heard that the 12th Infantry Brigade was in urgent need of assistance. Orders were forthwith despatched to the field ambulances, and presently a bearer subdivision of the 11th Field Ambulance marched down to Venizel Bridge with four ambulance wagons, while another bearer subdivision of the 10th crossed to reinforce its hard-worked comrades in the unpleasantly exposed girls' school at Bucy-le-Long. It was late in the afternoon when a message came in from the regimental medical officer of the Lancashire Fusiliers, Captain J. B. Grogen, informing Colonel Faunce that he had numerous wounded in Billy-sur-Aisne, south of the river. There being no difficulty in the way of taking ambulance wagons to this hamlet, six were sent at once, and removed more than forty wounded to the Château of Rozières, within a short distance of Septmonts, where the arrival of the personnel of No. 6 Clearing Hospital had made it possible for the A.D.M.S. of the division to open what was in effect a divisional or a corps collecting station and clearing hospital. Here, in point of fact, was the centre for the evacuation of wounded from the left flank of the British Expeditionary Force, just as Braisne had become the centre of evacuation behind the right flank and the right centre, and Serches, and, later, Mont de Soissons Farm, in rear of the left centre.

Evacuation of wounded from the immediate rear of the Fourth Division was as yet, however, a very much

more difficult and critical undertaking. Difficult because the bridge was not yet sufficiently repaired to support wheeled traffic, and critical because the dressing station at Bucy-le-Long and the regimental aid posts elsewhere were becoming, or had already become, congested with wounded, and because carriage by bearers to the bridge and to the south side of it was an almost hopeless undertaking. Bucy-le-Long is at least a mile from the river, a long "carry" even for a strong force of bearers able to relieve one another. The road thither was, moreover, exposed to enemy observation, and was continuously and liberally plastered with high-explosive shells. However, about sixty wounded were got across the bridge, and were cleared in ambulance wagons already waiting there for them.

As the evening drew in and dusk fell, the D.A.D.M.S., Major Ensor, whose work at Le Cateau had attracted attention because of his energy and initiative, marshalled ten ambulance wagons at Billy-sur-Aisne, intending to get them across the bridge, which was now open for wheeled traffic. But guns were being manhandled over, the approaches were blocked by waiting teams, and fighting units had to cross before the medical service. It was not, therefore, until 6 A.M. of the following day that Major Ensor, by dint of taking the first available opportunity, contrived to get two ambulance wagons over the water. It was light then, and shells began to fall into the river and on the roads north and south. But the R.A.M.C. continued at the work of manhandling its ambulance wagons, getting all securely across but two, one of which crashed over a bank. Horses were then led singly over the trembling bridge, were hooked in as the shells fell, and finally the convoy went off to Bucy-le-Long at a gallop.

In the meanwhile wounded were accumulating at the school-house, while numbers were being sheltered in the church at St. Marguerite, to which the officer commanding the bearer subdivision of No. 10 Field Ambulance had sent a detachment. In all there were

some 240, whose evacuation in spite of the presence of the ambulance wagons was still an impossibility owing to severe shell-fire. In the circumstances all that was possible was done for the wounded, and bearers were sent out to search the surroundings of the villages.

"No. 10 Field Ambulance" (the bearers) "collected wounded under heavy shrapnel fire," Major Ensor states, "but suffered no damage."

As dusk fell again, a final and successful effort was made to clear the dressing stations. More ambulance wagons were concentrated at Billy-sur-Aisne, just south of Venizel, and came across to the north bank; with them also a tent subdivision of one of the medical units, which opened in Bucy-le-Long. When night fell there were eighteen ambulance wagons in Bucy-le-Long, and in these were evacuated, during the hours of darkness, all wounded who were capable of removal. A few were too severely hurt, and were made comfortable in the dressing stations. The others reached Rozières in the early hours of the morning of the 15th, and were sent later on, when fed and dressed again, to Neuilly St. Front, a point a considerable distance away on the railway.

The medical situation of the Fourth Division as it existed on the evening of the 15th was, save for one necessary change brought about by shell-fire, unaltered during the remainder of the first phase of the operations. The little church at St. Marguerite, which stood on the north side of the main street, and had up to the end of 1917 miraculously survived many a shell, acted as the advanced dressing station for all three infantry brigades. The school-house at Bucy-le-Long was the dressing station to which St. Marguerite sent its cases, and to which wounded were brought direct from the left and left centre of the division. Across the river, at La Carrière l'Evecque Farm, was the main portion of each of the three field ambulances, from which, as dusk fell, convoys of ambulance wagons and extra bearers

emerged and crossed the water, while those officers who could be spared were sent to the divisional collecting station or clearing hospital at Château-Rozières, a mile farther back. How hazardous was this convoy work is illustrated by the adventure of a detachment of No. 11 Field Ambulance, which, not yet having grasped the full importance of concealment, sought to rendezvous near Venizel in broad daylight, preparatory to the night's journey to the dressing station at Bucy-le-Long. The roads were plastered with high-explosive shells. One hit some neighbouring transport, where two men were killed and six wounded, and three horses put out of action. The bearers picked up the wounded and dressed their injuries. But they would not be driven off, and instead sat down doggedly, enduring the shell-fire till at length dusk fell and gave them welcome cover. Perhaps this was not the very wisest course to have pursued, but at least this stubbornness on the part of the R.A.M.C. demonstrated that it was not devoid of courage.

The united efforts of the R.A.M.C. of the Fourth Division had now enabled 107 sitting, and 60 lying down or stretcher cases to be brought over the river; so that, as the 16th September dawned, and the sun attempted to break through the damp mist filling the river valley, and the thin drizzle of rain which now seemed to have become a permanent accompaniment of the Aisne operations, the detachments in the dressing station found time to breathe, to eat, and to sleep, for there remained only eight wounded men to be cared for, and they so gravely hurt that movement was impossible. But desultory fighting continued, and resulting casualties dribbled into the dressing stations; those at the church at St. Marguerite being brought along, during the lulls in the firing, to Bucy-le-Long, there to await the night's convoy. For this transfer four ambulance wagons were kept at Bucy. At night forty more wounded men were safely transported to the south bank and so to Rozières, the journey from Venizel thither being a slow and tedious

business, for the hills are steep, the roads were deep in mud, and slippery, and the work so heavy that double teams had to be hitched to each ambulance wagon. The long-suffering horse found his task almost more arduous on this portion of the Aisne front than during the retreat; and these first few days of the operations left the horses of the three field ambulances as nearly foundered as they had been in August. It is not surprising that the issue of three motor ambulances some four days later, and the contrast they presented as they literally romped up the steep ascents, filled the R.A.M.C. with admiration, not to say with envy, and with something approaching detestation of their horse transport.

The 17th September proved a somewhat exciting day, filled with vigorous movement for the R.A.M.C., for German guns were busier. Bucy-le-Long became in particular their target, and about 11 A.M. shells were crashing into the long curling street, or were smashing through the slated roofs of the houses. The school, under the roof of which the dressing station was sheltered, did not long escape. It received two direct hits, and one shell in its course killed outright a wounded man lying on his stretcher. In the midst of the bombardment, just after 2 P.M., Major Ensor entered the village to inspect the medical arrangements, as was his wont on two or three occasions every day, and to inquire after the safety of the wounded and the R.A.M.C. He ran the gauntlet of falling German shells—"250-lb. shells from siege guns," he says—and reaching the partially wrecked dressing station, discovered "the staff quite indifferent to the bombardment, and busy attending to the wounded collected in the morning."

That he did not unwittingly exaggerate conditions, nor describe a casual shelling as a bombardment is substantiated by the fact, also mentioned, that the shelling endured from 11 A.M. to 5 P.M., and that its severity drove the Headquarters Staffs of the 10th and 11th Infantry Brigades from the houses they were

occupying in Bucy-le-Long to the shelter provided by cellars. It is not astonishing, then, that he adds the following :

> I spoke to the R.A.M.C. personnel, highly commending their behaviour, and went round the wounded, promising them that they would be removed by night.

Removal just then was out of the question as the bombardment continued, and transfer to another house offered no amelioration of conditions in Bucy-le-Long, " as one place seemed just as safe as another." He adds a somewhat droll description of the effect of shell-fire :

> The shells exploded with a great noise, but from observation of one which fell close, they did not appear to do much harm beyond wrecking the houses.

In one of those houses, be it remembered, lay British wounded, on whom the personnel of the R.A.M.C. attended in spite of the effects of falling shells, and oblivious of the wrecked houses. One can judge from this instance what was the behaviour of the medical service. Outside, falling shells and tumbling houses. Above, a roof recently smashed by German missiles. Within, British wounded, one killed already by the bombardment, and presently three of the R.A.M.C. added to the number of wounded. As for the ambulance wagons, they were out in the open, and nearly every one of the horses was killed, so that for this reason alone evacuation was impossible. Not until night fell could the cases be sent across the river in the convoy of ambulance wagons despatched to Bucy-le-Long for them, while at the same time many wounded who had been retained throughout the day in the regimental aid posts were sent along the shattered street of the village, and having been dressed at the dressing station were despatched with the convoy.

For consistently good work at the shattered dressing station and for devotion to duty during these first few days of the Aisne offensive, Privates W. J. J. Leach and

R. Mears of the R.A.M.C. were mentioned in despatches, and both received the D.C.M. No doubt their conduct had been conspicuous amongst a company of officers and men, any one or all of whom might have been selected for special mention.

The affair of the dressing station at Bucy-le-Long culminated in its transfer to a farmhouse half-a-mile west of the village, close to Le Moncel, where there were two excellent cellars in which wounded could be placed in the event of a repetition of the bombardment. However, shelling became less severe and no longer troubled the R.A.M.C. Wounded were far less numerous, so that the question of evacuation was not any longer pressing. Had it been so, the three motor ambulances which on the 19th were attached to the division would have lent real assistance. They were employed in carrying severe cases direct from Le Moncel to the railhead.

The 20th September was marked by German activity on this left flank of the British Expeditionary Force. But no actual counter-attack was made as was the case on the extremity of the right flank. It resulted in only eleven casualties, which gave no additional work to the medical service.

The position of affairs once the first phase was ended altered but little, and as regards the medical service with the British divisions only in detail. The work of removing sick and wounded from the front line continued, while the arrangements for the removal of all casualties from the Aisne area—in the first phase of the operations no light undertaking—became better organised and elaborated. It was the first occasion when a temporarily immobile front allowed of fixed centres of evacuation and permitted clearing hospitals to actually take their place and play to a greater extent their part in the scheme of medical organisation laid down years before the war. The Aisne, in fact, provided the first effective test of the utility of the clearing hospital, the work of which, and the activities of the R.A.M.C. on

the lines of communication right down to the bases, now call for attention.

But before leaving the actual front it may be well to review the lessons learnt by this, the third general engagement with the enemy since the campaign had opened. Mention has already been made of the lack of transport provided with medical units, and since this question is one which dominated the effective evacuation of Braisne and other places where casualty clearing stations were posted, it will be dealt with later. It may be said, however, that the question, acute enough at Mons and during the retreat, had become accentuated, so that its sudden, if only partial, relief was a blessing which every one in the R.A.M.C. could fully appreciate.

Another lesson which shell-fire had forced upon the notice of the medical service was the unsuitability of the first-aid dressing, provided to all soldiers, for the treatment of shell wounds. This dressing is enclosed in a waterproof cover, on which full directions for use are clearly printed. It can be opened with ease, when a simple dressing sufficient to cover and protect the ordinary gun-shot wound is discovered. But shell wounds were already very numerous amongst our total of wounded, and fragments from high-explosive shells, the general and free use of which had not hitherto been common to warfare, were producing lacerated wounds and extensive damage for which the first field dressing was obviously unsuitable seeing that it covered only a portion of the damage. It needs only to state that representations were at once made, experiments were carried out, and in due course a special shell dressing was devised and issued to the bearers in the trenches and to field medical units.

Other lessons, though they concern the whole of the medical service, concern more particularly clearing hospitals and medical units on the lines of communication; they refer in particular to tetanus, of which there had already been numerous cases, and to gas gangrene, an alarming condition found among a proportion of the

wounded. Both, it was appreciated, were due to infection by the highly cultivated nature of the ground over which the troops were operating. For the one, anti-tetanic serum was already in use, and as one might expect, was included in the up-to-date stores of the R.A.M.C. But there was no great quantity of it, and the sudden demand for a serum which takes long to prepare was therefore in the nature of a problem. However, the position was boldly faced and supplies were sought in all directions, while laboratories, both military and civil, were set to work to produce abundant supplies for the future. The use of anti-tetanic serum in all cases of lacerated wounds soon brought about a welcome reduction of the number of cases of tetanus. Finally, the strict enforcement of an order that all wounded, without exception, should be promptly injected with this serum, practically swept the disease out of existence. Amongst thousands of wounded in some of the recent offensive actions of the British Expeditionary Force there has been almost an entire absence of tetanus cases.

Gas gangrene still engages the attention of surgeons and bacteriologists. Its prevalence, immediately upon the opening of hostilities, provided one of those numerous problems which the medical service was called upon to solve as rapidly as possible, or at least to provide some treatment which should be effective for its amelioration. It is a condition of affairs set up by the infection of wounds, usually of a grave nature, by organisms of particularly virulent character. They attack damaged and partially destroyed tissue, such as results, for instance, from a severe shell wound, where muscle tissue is bruised and crushed, and their action, besides generating an offensive gas which infiltrates muscle and the tissues generally, sets up such a degree of toxic absorption, that the patient, already weakened by reason of his wound, succumbs too readily to this additional call upon his lessened powers of resistance.

Improved methods of surgical treatment and the free drainage of wounds has brought about a satisfactory

reduction in the incidence and mortality of this elusive and distressing malady.

The incidence of enteric fever, too, naturally enough caused some misgivings, for the first cases had been detected during the Aisne fighting. In previous warfare enteric has proved time and again the scourge of armies, and some of the R.A.M.C., remembering those days, and casting their minds back to the condition of affairs in South Africa, may have had qualms when they first diagnosed the disease at Braisne or at Rozières. However, enteric fever has never become of an epidemic character on the Western Front; and even when the British Expeditionary Force had expanded from its puny 100,000 to perhaps 2,000,000, there were fewer cases of this disease than existed in September 1914 in the original Expeditionary Force. Without a shadow of doubt this gratifying state of affairs is due almost entirely to the system of inoculation which has been universally accepted by the soldier, assisted by the continuous and enlightened work of the sanitary branch of the medical service.

Just to quote a case to illustrate the point, the British Expeditionary Force when it reached Flanders and the Poperinghe—Ypres area, was billeted in a district which swarmed with French and Belgian refugees, many of whom were then suffering from enteric. There was grave fear that the disease would be transmitted to our soldiers; but the medical service obtained drastic powers, segregated sick civilians, searched high and low for enteric "carriers," made certain of the water supply to troops, prohibited the drinking of unboiled milk or of untested beer and mineral waters, and in one way and another stamped out a serious epidemic. By these drastic and enlightened methods it undoubtedly preserved the British Expeditionary Force from infection, and checked at its very source an epidemic which, had it spread to the troops, would have proved nothing short of a calamity. One of the first aims of the R.A.M.C. is to conserve the health of the soldier so that a high

percentage of each fighting unit may be always fit for active service. At this stage, as later, Britain required all and more than all the trained men she possessed. It will be the more readily appreciated then what the country owes to the R.A.M.C. for successfully organising this protection from disease.

# CHAPTER XX

The importance of evacuation—Theoretical areas or zones—The middle zone—Agony of motor-lorry journeys—Commencing abolition of previous scheme of evacuation by motor lorry—The motor-ambulance convoy—Nucleus of a new scheme—Clearing hospitals—An incident at Bazoches—B.R.C.S. nurses—Extemporising hospitals—The third zone of evacuation—The regimental medical officer—The British Expeditionary Force *en route* to Flanders.

Amongst the many important functions of a medical service none is of more urgent consequence than that appertaining to the removal or evacuation of sick and wounded, particularly of the latter, from the immediate field of operations.

If the conditions of an army in the field engaged in active fighting be examined closely, it will be swiftly appreciated that—the direct consequence to the wounded apart—neglect or inability to collect and clear casualties from the fighting line must of necessity reflect adversely upon the efficiency of the purely combatant units. It may be definitely stated that from the Commander-in-chief to the humblest soldier all are adversely influenced by the presence of wounded. In trench warfare they clog the trenches and stand in the path of their uninjured comrades, while in the event of forced retreat their presence may well delay swift and prompt decision to retire, so leaving them to fall into the hands of the enemy. Advance, on the other hand, has no such concern for a commander, who, conscious of the presence of a trained medical service, can push on without thought of the wounded, his advance automatically clearing his ranks.

The action at Mons and the retreat to Paris, the

advance over the Marne, and the Aisne operations provide three apt illustrations. In the former the rapidity of the retreat and the fatal want of adequate and efficient ambulance transport compelled the abandonment of wounded. The ranks of the retreating British Expeditionary Force were automatically cleared, at cost to the British soldier, and no doubt to the disadvantage of the German Medical Corps, which thus had additional cases to care for.

During the advance over the Marne the firing-line was as swiftly and as automatically bereft of its helpless cases because of the forward movement. Here the important difference was that our wounded were left in the hands of British medical units, and were assured of prompt and adequate treatment. Moreover a large percentage no doubt recovered in due course and again became effective soldiers.

The Aisne provided an illustration of the need of rapid evacuation, and of the importance of this work on the part of the R.A.M.C. Had wounded not been rapidly removed they would most certainly have embarrassed their hale comrades, while their presence could not otherwise than have caused anxiety to a commander alive to the fact that his positions were in parts precarious.

Theoretical zones have been marked out for this oftentimes dangerous and almost always arduous operation. The forward or collecting zone comprises the fire trench, the regimental aid post, the advanced dressing station, and other dressing stations or stations organised by field ambulances. That the work of collecting and removing wounded from this zone is arduous in the extreme and not lacking in danger perhaps has already been made abundantly apparent. It is succeeded, in theory again, by a middle zone, a comparatively quiescent area, some few miles behind the fighting line, though not necessarily out of range of enemy artillery. Generally speaking, however, it is the non-danger zone, though the difficulty of the work imposed upon the R.A.M.C. is in no way

lessened. Finally there is the zone, comprised by the lines of communication, the railway leading to the base and hospitals disposed along it, as well as hospitals at the base and in the United Kingdom.

A description of these two stages of evacuation—the middle and the lines of communication and base zones—will complete that of the general medical arrangements during the Aisne fighting.

Braisne and Mont de Soissons Farm and Rozières were the nodal points or centres of concentration behind the British front, where wounded were accumulated. But only Braisne, behind the right flank, can be said to have been of importance. It lies on the railway, provided in those days adequate and suitable accommodation, and was within easy reach of the trench line. Mont de Soissons Farm, on the other hand, though as easily accessible, was miles from the railway, and provided limited accommodation. Evacuation at frequent intervals was a more pressing problem, and during the first week of the offensive, because of the absence of railway or of other means of transport, was carried out by returning empty motor supply lorries, which followed the rolling route to Fère-en-Tardenois, the railhead of the division. Here, indeed, almost out of the sound of the conflict, many miles behind, lay the real middle evacuating zone of the Fifth Division.

That of the Fourth Division at the Château of Rozières, across the Aisne valley, reached after a climb up the slippery sides of the higher ground which looks down upon the river, was little, if any, better situated than was Mont de Soissons Farm. It provided but meagre accommodation, and during those first few strenuous days it could be cleared only by the help of motor lorries, though a light railway, then lying wrecked by the enemy, normally gave access to Soissons in one direction and to Oulchy Breny and Neuilly St. Front, far to the south and on the main railway. It were well, perhaps, not to dwell too often nor too severely upon the agony of those motor-lorry journeys. After the

first week of this particular fighting the British soldier and the R.A.M.C. were happily and finally quit of them. It had required actual warfare to test a scheme always regarded askance by the medical service, and to prove it in practice to be worse than inadequate. Yet the lesson bore fruit. The sufferings of our wounded, and the obvious defects of the system whereby evacuation depended on motor lorries, and they upon the goodwill of those who controlled them, had raised a storm of protests, and already a counter-scheme was afoot. Indeed it matured as already indicated, before the first week of the Aisne campaign had terminated, in the issue of numerous motor ambulances which were hurried up to the army. But, till then, the motor lorry earned many an approbrious reference in official diaries. To quote but one :

"The wounded coming in by motor-transport lorries," says an R.A.M.C. officer of senior rank, then at Oulchy Breny, in the most definite manner, "have stated in the case of a large proportion of them that they suffered excruciatingly by reason of the jolting of the vehicles."

Few will care to gainsay the statement. A motor omnibus is not the vehicle one would select for the transfer of a man whose thigh is fractured. Yet thigh cases travelled from Mont de Soissons Farm to Fère-en-Tardenois, and others passed through purgatory on the harsh road from Rozières to Oulchy Breny. But the termination of the first week of the fighting on the Aisne marked definitely the end of such agonising journeys. Motor ambulances gloriously relieved the situation, as the R.A.M.C. had said they would when advocating their use before the war was contemplated — that is, contemplated by Britain. Motor ambulances now swept all the severely wounded from Mont de Soissons Farm direct to Braisne, they cleared the actual front of wounded, and their coming and the repair of the light railway from Rozières southward put a definite end to the transport of seriously wounded on heavy motor vehicles. Yet it should be clearly stated that evacuation from Mont

de Soissons Farm by motor lorry continued; though now only selected cases — the lightly wounded — were permitted to board these vehicles.

Some half-dozen of these useful motor ambulances were issued to each British division about the 20th September, while an officer, Major Percy Evans, R.A.M.C., was sent to Paris to collect others with which to form an ambulance park or convoy. No more important link in the operations of evacuating wounded exists than the motor ambulance convoy, the germ of which idea sprang into being at this period. Indeed it is not too strong a statement that to the motor ambulance convoy is due not a small portion of the excellence of organisation justly attributed to the medical service. It helped—the mere nucleus of the first convoy only—to clear up a difficult situation on the Aisne and to point the way to future evacuations. It saved the situation in the coming first battle of Ypres, and often afterwards. It provided, in fact, a vital link, till then totally missing, between the casualty clearing station and the actual front, and the casualty clearing station and the railway, and in the event of an interruption of the latter—no uncommon event—it made evacuation then a simple problem as compared with August 1914. Comparison of the swiftness of movement or the comfort provided by such vehicles with the slowness and jolting of the motor lorries would offend the reader. Suffice it to say that fifty motor ambulances were collected at General Headquarters, comprising every variety of make, a heterogeneous collection which made the provision of spare parts a difficulty. The advisability of standardising convoys was at once realised, and thereafter, wherever possible, certain marques or makes were run together. Other convoys were soon collected. The nation owes a deep debt to the British Red Cross Society and the Order of St. John in this respect, for with that energy for which the Joint Society has become justly noted, it soon presented a number of convoys to the army, this not including the convoys it ran by

means of its own drivers at the base and elsewhere. By November the British Expeditionary Force possessed five complete convoys, the last the gift of Sir A. du Cros, while numerous convoys have been steadily added. If any one doubt their utility—their indispensability indeed —let him be present at some major operation and imagine conditions without the presence of this all-important vehicle. It and the motor lorry—strangely enough, in view of the drastic criticism already written of it—have become indispensable to the medical service.

Clearing hospitals were rushed to various strategical points in the middle zone—the 4th and 5th to Braisne, the 1st to Fère-en-Tardenois, the 2nd to Neuilly St. Front. The remnants of the 6th, less all its equipment, went to Rozières. No clearing hospital, however, was sent to Mont de Soissons Farm, which provided only sufficient accommodation for a collecting station. Thus provision was made at all railheads for the reception of wounded, and lest the congested condition of the railway should delay the arrival of the clearing hospitals, two of them were rushed up to the scene of operations by motor lorry, a wise decision on the part of the D.M.S., as was soon amply proved. The 4th Clearing Hospital, bound for Braisne, was held up owing to a dense block on the railway. Its locomotive disappeared as if by magic. A resourceful commanding officer then commandeered another, and by dint of much persuasion, almost of threats, induced the driver to take the train onward. At midnight, in the dense darkness of a drenching, miserable night, it crawled towards Bazoches, where both lines were choked with trucks and carriages, amongst them two of the British ambulance trains. Outside the station, where the clearing hospital and the two ambulance trains were halted, roads leading to Bazoches were packed with motor lorries, in which, huddled beneath soaked blankets, and weary after an indescribable journey from the front, lay hundreds of British wounded. French cavalry streamed along the road, increasing the confusion. British troops trudged

past, cursing the block, the rain, and the darkness. Indeed it was an appallingly miserable night. In the midst of the jumble was the officer commanding this motor transport, storming and raving, demanding stridently that his vehicles be unloaded, as he had orders to refill and move back to the front before dawn broke.

In such miserable and drenching surroundings the personnel of the two ambulance trains and of the clearing hospital worked all night, transferring wounded to the trains. No platform was available. That meant that each man must needs be lifted at arm's length so as to reach the floors of the *fourgons*. It was early morning before the work was completed. The clearing hospital watched the ambulance trains depart, one followed by a train of carriages filled with the overflow of wounded. Then it moved on to Braisne, hoping, perhaps, for a few hours' leisure. It met convoys of laden ambulance wagons creaking through the streets. It saw other convoys toiling toward Braisne from the direction of the river. It discovered the tent divisions of the field ambulances overwhelmed with wounded, and, metaphorically taking off its coat, it plunged into the business of opening hospital, of securing additional buildings, of procuring beds and bedding, food, water, and other items essential to it. Day and night the clearing hospital worked on. The commanding officer, Major J. G. M'Naught, had only two medical officers with him, the others having been shed on the way north for vital posts on the lines of communication. These three officers, helped by medical officers from certain field ambulances, dealt with no fewer than 1000 wounded in a single day, and with many hundreds during the first week or so after their arrival. At the commencement they controlled merely the French Civil Hospital and some adjacent buildings. A few days found their wounded crowding a house termed the "German Hospital," because of the German wounded in it, a hat factory, the church, and a house specially allotted to officers.

Fortunately the 5th Clearing Hospital arrived at this

time, on the 24th September, and at once gave relief to the 4th. It had first done work at Fère-en-Tardenois beside the 1st Clearing Hospital where wounded had congregated from Mont de Soissons Farm. But the coming of the motor ambulance had materially altered the situation and lessened the importance of Fère-en-Tardenois as an evacuating centre. Meanwhile, too, there had been a noticeable lull in the operations, and though fighting went on along the whole line, it tended very decidedly to gravitate towards the right flank, near Troyon, where British and French troops joined hands. Here it was that German counter-attacks were most determined and frequent, and as a consequence Braisne, the evacuating zone immediately behind the right flank, became far busier than other centres. The 5th Clearing Hospital went up by road, took over part of the hospital accommodation of the 4th Clearing Hospital, and gave timely assistance. Braisne in those days was a hospital town, fortunately undisturbed by enemy shelling, though, curiously enough, when fighting had died down and British troops had for the most part already moved off to, or were actually in Flanders, and the clearing hospitals themselves were about to depart, having cleared their hospitals, German shells thudded into Braisne, into the streets once thronged with ambulance wagons, into the church which but a few days ago had sheltered British wounded, and into houses wherein the R.A.M.C. had cared for them. It looked like a summons to depart. The R.A.M.C. acted upon it!

Little need be said of the work of the 1st and 2nd and 6th Clearing Hospitals at Fère-en-Tardenois, Neuilly St. Front, and Rozières respectively. The two former were posted to strategical positions on the railways, and did as strenuous work as did those at Braisne. The 6th Clearing Hospital was merely the remnant of a unit. It had shed its equipment at the base. It had sent its personnel as reinforcements to various medical units; and finally, with a view of making good the gaps in Third Corps medical units, it had marched

across the country of the Marne entirely bereft of equipment. Now attached to this field ambulance and then to that, its weary personnel, drenched to the skin, reached Noyant, close to Rozières and Soissons, on the night of the 12th, when no British soldiers were to be discovered. The place swarmed with Turcos, France's colonial soldiers. Every house was packed with these lusty fighters, and in amongst them Colonel B. Ford and his men slept on the night of their arrival. Long before nightfall of the 13th they were in the Château of Rozières, where, with borrowed equipment and some considerable invention they had contrived a suitable hospital, in which 190 wounded were housed that evening. Others arrived on the 14th. Three hundred surged to the place on the following day. Between the 13th and 21st above 1000 were borne between the portals of the château. Of these thirteen died of wounds, and lie at peace in the garden. The others went by road to Oulchy Breny, jolted and shaken every foot of the way, suffering unimaginable torture. The subject is not one to pursue, for sufficient has already been written. Suffice it that those days of agony were almost past. The new era of modern motor transport was on the eve of banishing a harsher method.

There is one distinctly happy side to the medical arrangements in the Aisne area. Nursing sisters did not form part of the personnel of clearing hospitals in August 1914, though since October of that year they have been attached to all such units. At Braisne, however, the wounded and the R.A.M.C. were fortunate in the presence of four trained nurses for whose presence their own devotion and the energy of the B.R.C.S. were responsible. There rolled into the town on the 21st September a convoy of motor ambulances of nondescript appearance, of all ages and varied structure. They bore the aspect of once pretentious—nay, luxurious—vehicles, camouflaged for the occasion, with bodies recklessly altered and rearranged or removed entirely, in every case with accommodation fit for the conveyance of

wounded. They came under the control of a burly American, Mr. Sherman, who, in the months to come, became a familiar figure in Flanders, known to all the medical service. Each motor ambulance was stuffed with medical comforts for the wounded, and out of them there emerged three trained nurses, of whom two remained, these two, who departed on the following day, being replaced by four others. The quartette, the Nurses White, Beese, Munro, and Mlle. Rouffiard, were installed in the various hospitals in Braisne, and, without doubt, the wounded, still surviving those strenuous days, who came under their tender ministration will recollect with gratitude the nurses who cared for them, and will endorse these notes of the officer commanding the 4th Clearing Hospital, who states emphatically: "They rendered invaluable assistance to us." What with the R.A.M.C., these nursing sisters, and the assistance of Stabsarzt Kissing, a captured German medical officer who did willing service, the wounded in this evacuating centre were well attended; and hospitals, which a couple of weeks before housed operatives engaged in the peaceful avocations of hat-making, or of the brewing of beer, or which gave shelter beneath an ancient roof to the worshippers of Braisne, now bore a well-ordered and comfortable appearance. The problem, it should be noted, of converting buildings used for commercial purposes or as habitations into suitable hospitals, with little or no available equipment, is one which taxes the initiative and energy of medical officers. The place is a bare factory as the morning dawns. The whirr and throb of heavy machinery has scarcely died down. Wounded appear on the threshold. There are no beds, no baths, no tables and chairs. The clearing hospital has merely its medical and surgical equipment, and a couple of hundred unstuffed paillasses. Moreover, it has wounded pouring in in a demoralising stream. Yet at nightfall the work is well forward. It progresses as the hours pass. There emerges from the seeming chaos of the opening hours a tidy, well-arranged hospital.

Beds are there, borrowed, procured, obtained in this way and in that from the neighbourhood. Baths even are available. Heating has been arranged, food supplied, and the cooking of invalid diets has not been neglected. Machinery, now still and motionless, may overhang the beds. Ward orderlies and sisters may tread concreted floors. The operating theatre is as likely as not in the counting-house, or in the sanctum sanctorum—the manager's office. But the transformation is complete. The place is no longer a commercial centre. It is a hospital, capable of dealing with the severely wounded, prepared to give them up-to-date and adequate treatment, and to feed them as the occasion warrants.

In parting for the moment with clearing hospitals, we refer once more, though briefly, to the nursing of British wounded. As indicated, nursing sisters were from this date attached to all clearing hospitals, as also to ambulance trains, and, of course, they formed part, and no unimportant part, of the personnel of base medical units. But their absence from front line and middle zone units until after the Aisne operations results in an almost entire omission of their mention in this volume. However, in Flanders, in Gallipoli, and in other theatres of war they presently came much into evidence, and in due course their invaluable, oftentimes heroic, services will call for adequate description.

Behind the middle zone, medical arrangements, during the Aisne fighting, swiftly extricated themselves from the chaos which first existed at St. Nazaire and elsewhere. Base hospitals returned to Rouen and Havre. Stationary hospitals organised at Le Mans. A clearing hospital supplied depots at every important railway station on the lines of communication. Paris was an intermediate point, and here No. 4 General Hospital took possession of the Trianon Hospital at Versailles, but a few miles from the capital. American hospitals at Neuilly and elsewhere threw open their doors for British wounded. The B.R.C.S. had beds available. The French military authorities offered to receive patients

at the Val de Grace, or at the Astoria Hotel now open as a military hospital. To these hospitals within the Paris area went cases taken from the ambulance trains *en route* to the Loire, when further travel meant danger to the individual. The majority of our wounded reached Le Mans or St. Nazaire, and were rapidly transferred to England. Presently, too, they were going to Havre and Rouen, where general hospitals were now open.

The end of the Aisne fighting and the transfer of British troops to Flanders coincided with a distinct re-establishment of order amongst lines of communication and base medical units. Every day added to the improvement, so that, as the strain of work slackened after the early days of October, became acute once more towards the end of the month, and rose to breaking point in the first days of November, base hospitals and other stationary units were far better prepared to house and care for the wounded, and indeed rendered vital assistance during the fighting for the Channel ports. Wounded from the gallant and all too slender line which held the Ypres salient and the front down to the neighbourhood of Bethune were more often than not whisked back to clearing hospitals by comfortable motor ambulances, were hurried west in ambulance trains of new construction, and found themselves at Boulogne, at Havre or Rouen, cosily between the sheets in real beds in hospitals not unlike those long since established in England. The tale belongs to Ypres, and the vast expansion of the medical service, and will be duly dealt with. Let it suffice that officers and men of the R.A.M.C., like their comrades of the fighting service, found themselves face to face with added difficulties, with a task of magnitude which taxed their every exertion. If they suffered in the performance of that task, if their ranks lessened, as indeed they did, in their unselfish endeavour to carry out their duty, then they suffered and gave their lives not in vain, for they helped the organisation of the medical service a stage further forward, they stemmed the gap while the medical pro-

fession of the United Kingdom prepared for service, and at least they brought some aid and assistance to their stricken comrades of the combatant service.

This narrative has mainly dealt with the movements of field ambulances, chiefly for the reason that they largely represented the medical service during the retreat to Paris, in the Marne operations, and during those on the Aisne. One of the multitudinous duties of all medical units is to provide an official diary of events. But this, unfortunately, is not the case with regimental medical officers, whose history, could it be ascertained and reproduced, would be of enthralling interest. For the regimental medical officer is always nearest the firing-line or actually in it. He it is who first treats the wounded man under conditions often enough more hazardous and infinitely more arduous than that in the case of field ambulances. Correspondingly, too, the work entails risk, as is shown by resulting casualties. Mons took its toll of many devoted regimental medical officers. Others fell or were captured at Le Cateau. The total of killed, wounded, and missing when the retreat was ended was high in proportion to the original number. The Marne operations proved less expensive, but the Aisne saw further gaps, while Ypres and succeeding operations to be presently recorded laid many a regimental medical officer low. It is not for the chronicler of the medical services to eulogise these gallant officers. Military despatches, honours, and awards, and, better than all, the glowing comments of brother officers of combatant units, have testified to the devotion to duty and unflinching conduct of these members of the R.A.M.C.

We leave the British Expeditionary Force *en route* to Flanders, where, hardened by weeks of warfare, a veteran if slender army now, it was attacked for long days together by strong German forces.

That it was outnumbered hardly needs mention. The important point to note is that the enemy superiority in numbers allowed of the constant withdrawal of tired

troops and their replacement by fresh divisions. British divisions were too few to allow of relief, so that for long days together the men remained in the front line, clinging tenaciously to positions which were almost continuously bombarded. Hollow-eyed for want of rest, gaunt and spare with the strain, they offered the most dogged and determined resistance imaginable. Though the Seventh Division, the Third Cavalry Division, and Indian troops had then reached the area of operations, it was a thin—a perilously thin—line which held the enemy. That line bent and swayed and cracked. Battalions crumbled. Casualties assumed hitherto-unheard-of proportions which called for extreme energy on the part of the R.A.M.C. Like their comrades of the fighting units, they too were but a relatively slender band, and the work well-nigh broke them. Yet Ypres is a tale which brought them laurels. They emerged from the trial strengthened in experience. The uneventful months of December 1914 and January and February 1915 gave opportunities to re-organise and re-equip, so that medical arrangements for the British offensive at Neuve Chapelle in March were better organised and more complete than had ever before been the case. It was as well, for Neuve Chapelle was but the first of numerous and more important British actions.

# APPENDIX I

THE STAFF OF SURGEON-GENERAL T. P. WOODHOUSE, THE D.M.S. IN FRANCE, WHO SAILED WITH THE EXPEDITIONARY FORCE IN AUGUST 1914.

## General Headquarters

| | |
|---|---|
| D.M.S. . . . . | Surgeon-General T. P. Woodhouse. |
| A.D.M.S. (Administration) | Lieut.-Colonel D. D. Shanahan. |
| A.D.M.S. (Sanitation) . | Lieut.-Colonel W. W. O. Beveridge. |
| Medical Officer . . | Major S. L. Cummins. |
| D.D.M.S. (Lines of Communication) . . | Colonel M. W. O'Keeffe. |
| A.D.M.S. (Sanitation) . | Major H. B. Fawcus. |
| A.D.M.S. (Administration) | Major J. V. Forrest. |

## First Army Corps

*Headquarters*

| | |
|---|---|
| D.D.M.S. . . . | Colonel T. J. O'Donnell. |
| Medical Officer . . | Major E. Ryan. |

## Second Army Corps

*Headquarters*

| | |
|---|---|
| D.D.M.S. . . . | Colonel R. Porter. |
| Medical Officer . . | Captain H. L. Moss. |

## Third Army Corps

*Headquarters*

| | |
|---|---|
| Medical Officer . . | Major P. Davidson. |

*Headquarters, Cavalry Division*

A.D.M.S. . . . Colonel S. Hickson.
D.A.D.M.S. . . . Major E. T. F. Birrell.

*Headquarters, First Division*

A.D.M.S. . . . Lieut.-Colonel G. Cree.
D.A.D.M.S. . . . Major A. B. Smallman.

*Headquarters, Second Division*

A.D.M.S. . . . Colonel H. N. Thompson.
D.A.D.M.S. . . . Major F. S. Irvine.

*Headquarters, Third Division*

A.D.M.S. . . . Lieut.-Colonel F. W. C. Jones.
D.A.D.M.S. . . . Major A. Chopping.

*Headquarters, Fourth Division*

A.D.M.S. . . . Colonel C. E. Faunce.
D.A.D.M.S. . . . Major H. N. Ensor.

*Headquarters, Fifth Division*

A.D.M.S. . . . Colonel R. H. S. Sawyer.
D.A.D.M.S. . . . Major J. H. Brunskill.

*Headquarters, No. 1 Base*

A.D.M.S. . . . Colonel C. C. Reilly.
Medical Officer . . Major W. M. Power.
Sanitary Officer . . Captain N. Low.

*Headquarters, No. 2 Base*

A.D.M.S. . . . Colonel S. Westcott.
Medical Officer . . Lieut.-Colonel S. Macdonald.
Sanitary Officer . . Captain A. L. Otway.

*Headquarters, No. 3 Base*

A.D.M.S. . . . Colonel E. H. L. Lynden-Bell.
Medical Officer . . Major J. J. W. Prescott.
Sanitary Officer . . Major W. F. Tyndale.

*Headquarters, Advanced Base*

A.D.M.S. . . . Lieut.-Colonel G. H. Barefoot.
Sanitary Officer . . Major P. MacKessack.

# APPENDIX II

## THE HORRORS OF WITTENBERG

### Official Report to the British Government

*Report on the Typhus Epidemic at Wittenberg Camp. Evidence from the Survivors*

Now that Major Priestley, R.A.M.C., Captain Vidal, R.A.M.C., and Captain Lauder, R.A.M.C., have been permitted to return to this country after a prolonged detention in Germany still unexplained, the Government Committee on the Treatment by the Enemy of British Prisoners of War are in a position to submit for the consideration of His Majesty's Government their report upon the conditions of the camp at Wittenberg during and prior to the epidemic of typhus which devastated it in the first six months of 1915.

The Committee had already in the course of their inquiries gathered much detailed information as to the state of things which obtained at Wittenberg during the fever, but until the information in their possession could be checked, corrected, and supplemented by the personal testimony of the above three officers, the Committee refrained from making any report, so appalling did the conditions disclosed to them appear to be.

Major Priestley, Captain Vidal, and Captain Lauder are, it should at once be stated, the only survivors of the six sent by the German authorities to take up at Wittenberg Camp the place of duty abandoned by their own medical staff when the presence of typhus manifested itself amongst the prisoners under their charge.

These officers have now detailed their experiences to the Committee, who feel that a report upon the whole situation ought no longer to be withheld, although definiteness on points of detail may still be lacking by reason of the fact that the professional records of the epidemic and its incidents kept by Major Priestley, Captain Vidal, and Captain Lauder were taken from

them before they were allowed to leave Germany, and that a promise made to Major Priestley and Captain Vidal that theirs would be returned to them after copies had been transcribed remains unfulfilled.

The Committee, however, have the less hesitation in deciding not to wait for records which in fact may never become available, for the reason that the accounts of their experiences given by Major Priestley, Captain Vidal, and Captain Lauder fully confirm those statements in the possession of the Committee, to which reference has already been made.

### *Appalling Conditions at Wittenberg Camp*

The camp at Wittenberg is built on a flat, sandy plain devoid of trees or shrubs. The total area of the camp is about 10½ acres, and it is surrounded by the usual wire entanglements. It is subdivided into eight companies or compounds, intended to be separated from each other, but not so in practice. Every compound contains on an average six wooden bungalows in which the men are housed, each bungalow in turn being divided into two compartments or barracks, originally constructed, it is believed, to accommodate 120 men. In fact, however, there were frequently before and during the epidemic 180 to 200 prisoners in a barrack, so that the overcrowding was most serious.

In the early stages of the war and during the fever the camp was very full. The British prisoners numbered between 700 and 800. There was a much larger number of French and Belgians, but the Russians always greatly preponderated over all the others. It is believed that before and during the progress of the typhus there were at least 15,000 prisoners in the camp, and there may have been as many as 16,000 or 17,000—an enormous population for so restricted an area as 10½ acres.

The winter of 1914–15 was extremely severe and the cold at Wittenberg intense, but the heating arrangements for the camp were altogether inadequate. Although there were two stoves to each bungalow, frequently during the winter there was a great shortage of fuel, while the stoves were so constructed that it was only if they were both constantly stoked with all the coal they could possibly hold that a bungalow was reasonably warmed. Often there was no coal for either stove, and the temperature was so low that the men had always to keep every window shut to husband what little warmth there was. This greatly aggravated the evil of the overcrowding above referred to.

Moreover, the men were insufficiently clothed. From most of the British prisoners their overcoats were taken on the day of

their capture; none were given them in exchange. Their remaining clothes were often in rags; some of the men had even to use their blankets as clothing. Occasionally a prisoner had received a thin cotton shirt, but there were many with neither boots nor socks; many others had their feet wrapped in straw. They were provided with no change of underclothing, and there were no means of washing the scanty clothing they had, for, at that time, no wash-house existed in the camp. For personal ablutions there was only one trough or tap to each compound, and that was frequently frozen. No hot water was available except that which came from the cook-house. As a consequence the state of the prisoners beggars description. Major Priestley found them gaunt, of a peculiar grey pallor, and verminous. Their condition, in his own words, was deplorable.

The food with which they were supplied was bad and insufficient. The Committee are well aware that the difference between German food and cooking and that to which British soldiers are ordinarily accustomed induces prisoners to magnify deficiencies in this respect. But after every allowance on this head is made, the Committee are left with a record of suffering, owing to the lack of wholesome food, which they cannot but deplore. It was the men's food which was so bad and deficient. During the whole period the medical officers were well provided for at a price of 1.50 m. a day. There was no general scarcity, a fact which makes the treatment of the rank and file all the more difficult to justify or excuse.

When Major Priestley arrived at Wittenberg Camp the allowance of bread was one kilo loaf for ten men. Breakfast for the men, he says, consisted of black (acorn?) coffee and bread. The bread contained a high percentage of potato and was most unpalatable. Sometimes a thin soup was given for breakfast in place of coffee. The mid-day meal consisted of a soup made of potato flour, horse beans, soja flour, some form of grease, and a minimum of meat. Men would go for days without finding any meat in their bowl. Sometimes the mid-day soup contained a powerfully smelling sun-dried fish, at other times dried plums, etc. In the evening there was more thin soup containing margarine.

Before the outbreak there was a men's canteen, at which bread and some other articles could be bought, but this was closed with the departure of the German guards on the outbreak of the typhus, and was not reopened until after their return, when the epidemic was over.

Then the camp food improved, but since the month of May the English had become largely independent of it, for from that time they mainly subsisted on parcels sent them from home. No

parcels, however, reached the camp until May, and the Committee are satisfied that the German food previously supplied was, apart from its bad quality, quite insufficient to maintain vitality or enable an ordinary man to resist disease.

And the spread of the typhus, when it came, was much facilitated by a camp regulation, not confined to Wittenberg, which enjoined that the prisoners of all nationalities should be mixed together. Normally there was only one mattress for every three prisoners, and every British prisoner was compelled to have one French and one Russian prisoner to share his mattress with him.

### *Outbreak of the Epidemic*

Now typhus, as was fully recognised by the Russian doctors themselves, was unfortunately to some extent—but through no fault of their own—latent amongst some of the Russian troops, and it is a well-known medical fact that lice are the great carriers of that disease, while it is, of course, notorious that the men of all armies in the field, including the British, are plagued with lice. As a protection against typhus, therefore, the separation of the infected was an elementary precaution. But at Wittenberg no adequate measures were taken even to free the prisoners, on their arrival at the camp, from the lice. The only provision for personal cleanliness there made for the men was one cupful of soft soap issued at intervals of many weeks to a room containing at least 120. In consequence the men became increasingly verminous, and that condition, coupled with the cold and want of proper nourishment, was undoubtedly the principal inducing cause of the epidemic which supervened.

And the German authorities, although they were not ignorant of the danger, did nothing to prevent or minimise the spread of infection. That they knew it might become general throughout the camp is undoubted. German N.C.O.'s warned the French, shortly before the outbreak, of the risk, and when, during the course of the typhus, Captain Vidal, in order that its spread might be restricted as much as possible, asked a German officer, himself standing safely outside the camp, if the remaining healthy English could be placed together in one compound, his request was insultingly refused.

The medical and surgical arrangements were under the charge of Oberstabsarzt Dr. Aschenbach and his German assistants. At the outbreak of the epidemic there were no British medical officers at Wittenberg. There were a number of Russian, and there may have been some French doctors; of this the Committee are not certain.

*Decampment of German Military and Medical Staff*

The epidemic broke out in December 1914. Thereupon the German staff, military and medical, precipitately left the camp, and thenceforth, until the month of August 1915, with the exceptions detailed later on, no communication was held between the prisoners and their guards, except by means of directions shouted from the guards or officers remaining outside the wire entanglements of the camp. All supplies for the men were pushed into the camp over chutes. The food for the hospital and medical officers was passed in on a trolley over about twenty yards of rail, worked by winches at either end, so as to avoid all contact between the prisoners and the outside world. No medical attention during the whole time was provided by the German staff.

Of the happenings during the early weeks of the outbreak the information before the Committee is supplied by witnesses other than the medical officers who have recently returned, and accordingly the one observation the Committee make with regard to this period is that, when the typhus first appeared, the only hospital at the camp consisted of two wooden huts capable of holding about 100 patients, and that at the instance—as the Committee believe—of the Russian medical staff, the German authorities were induced to permit a part of Compound No. 8 to be used for the purpose of an improvised hospital, the accommodation at the old hospital having already become quite inadequate.

*British Medical Officers, unlawfully detained in Germany, substituted for German Staff*

The arrival of the British medical officers at the camp came about in the following way. From the month of November 1914 thirteen English doctors had been detained at Halle. They were none of them required for attendance upon their own men, and it is difficult to understand how, consistently with the Geneva Convention, their continued detention was justifiable. Indeed, in direct defiance of the provisions of that Convention, these doctors were treated as ordinary prisoners of war, and the Committee cannot resist the suspicion that they were deliberately detained by the German authorities so that they might be made available, if need be, for work of danger in relief of their own staff. Be that as it may, after three months' wrongful detention these doctors were, on the 10th February 1915 informed that they were to be distributed amongst the other German camps, and particularly that six were required for the camp at Wittenberg.

By arrangement amongst themselves the six sent there were Major Fry, Major Priestley, Captain Sutcliffe, Captain Field, Captain Vidal, and Captain—then Lieutenant—Lauder. No reason was given for the order that they should go to Wittenberg, and it was from the guard on the train that they first heard of typhus there.

On arrival at Wittenberg they were marched to the camp. They visited the different compounds. They were received in apathetic silence. The rooms were unlighted; the men were aimlessly marching up and down; some were lying on the floor, probably sickening for typhus. When they got into the open air again Major Fry broke down. The horror of it all was more than he could for the moment bear. Later in the evening Major Priestley and Captain Vidal were directed to go to two temporary hospitals outside the camp, Major Priestley to the Kronprinz Hospital, and Captain Vidal to the Elbarfin Hospital. There were no infectious diseases at either hospital, and the general conditions at each were satisfactory. These officers were kept there until the 7th March 1915.

Of the four officers left on the 11th February at the camp itself, Captain Lauder alone survives, and the conditions, as he describes them during the period between the 11th February and the 7th March are full of horror. The wonder is that any prisoner escaped infection.

### *The Horrors of the Epidemic*

Captain Lauder found, for instance, that while in the bungalow there was normally one mattress to three men, in the improvised hospital there were no mattresses at all. This, of course, was known throughout the camp, and in consequence there were many typhus patients scattered over the compounds who were determined not to come into the hospital if they could help it. In one compound alone Captain Lauder discovered fifty hidden cases of typhus. Further, when a patient was brought from the compound to the hospital, either the mattress on which he had lain was brought with him, or it was left behind in his bungalow. If it was brought with him his former companions were left without anything to sleep on; if it was left behind, his still uninfected companions were left to sleep upon the infected mattress, and it was almost inevitable that they should catch the disease. Again, in the absence of stretchers, all the typhus cases had to be carried down to the hospital on the tables on which the men ate their food, and there was no possibility of washing these tables, because, as above stated, there was practically no soap in the camp.

Moreover, the German authorities at first refused to allow the whole of Compound No. 8 to be used for typhus patients. They required that these should be mixed with other sufferers—a regulation for which it seems impossible to suggest any justification. The result simply was to spread the infection to those already afflicted in some other way.

During the first month the food ration for each patient was half a "petit pain" and half a cup of milk each per day. The only soup to be got was from the camp kitchen, but that came up in a wooden tub without a cover, and it arrived at the hospital—so one of the prisoners says—full of dust and dirt. It was hopeless diet for patients in a fever. In truth the ration was not a ration at all, it was a pretence. It was not even possible to give the patients warm water with their milk.

The camp conditions were too much for each of the four medical officers who were left there; two of them, Major Fry and Captain Sutcliffe, very soon sickened, and they died of typhus about a month after their arrival. Captain Field was attacked later by the disease and also died. There is no doubt in the minds of the Committee that the conditions to which the camp authorities had reduced the camp and the prisoners they had abandoned was directly responsible for the deaths of these devoted men. Lieutenant Lauder was finally stricken with the disease on the 7th March, after having for three days, with a temperature due to typhus, stuck to his work, there being no one then to take his place. He alone of the officers attacked finally recovered. When convalescent he bravely resumed his duty.

On 7th March Major Priestley and Captain Vidal were directed to return to the Main Camp. They were met there by Captain Field. Major Fry and Captain Sutcliffe were then dying; Lieutenant Lauder, as above explained, was in the early stages of typhus.

Two Russian medical generals were in command in the hospital. There were then about 1000 cases of typhus in the camp, and fresh cases were coming in at the rate of about fifty, and sometimes more, a day. There were at that time about 150 British cases.

The British sick were lying scattered amongst the French and the Russians, both in the Compound No. 8, and in the other compounds of the camp. Being sometimes dressed in French, Belgian, or Russian uniforms they were difficult to recognise. They were lying in their clothes on the floor or on the straw mattresses above described. In the beginning there were no beds in Compound No. 8; there were not even, as has been shown, mattresses for all. Major Priestley saw delirious men

waving arms brown to the elbow with faecal matter. The patients were alive with vermin; in the half-light he attempted to brush what he took to be an accumulation of dust from the folds of a patient's clothes, and he discovered it to be a moving mass of lice. In one room in Compound No. 8 the patients lay so close to one another on the floor that he had to stand straddle-legged across them to examine them.

Captain Vidal's description is even more appalling. It was impossible, he says, to obtain bed-pans for the British patients, and consequently in cases of delirium, and even in less serious cases, the state of the mattress was indescribable. Even such a thing as paper for sanitary purposes was almost unprocurable.

The difficulty in the way of obtaining sufficient drugs and dressings was for a long time extreme. Camphorated oil, Captain Lauder says, could never at Wittenberg, contrary to his experience in other German camps, be secured in adequate quantity, yet this was practically the only stimulant available. Day after day a list of medical requisites would be sent out, and only a third of the things requested would be supplied. Bed-sores were common. In several cases toes or whole feet became gangrenous, and sufficient bandages were not available to dress them. One of the patients now returned to this country, Private Lutwyche, of the 1st Battalion Royal Scots Fusiliers, had in May to have one leg amputated below the knee, and in July the other leg amputated at the same place, in both cases owing to gangrene. Had dressings at the proper time been available, both feet would, in all probability, have been saved. And his case does not stand alone. The officers are quite satisfied that the post-typhus gangrene which was so common was largely due to the fact that for so many patients there were neither socks nor anything else to keep their feet warm.

In the earlier stages of the epidemic there was practically no hospital clothing available for the British prisoners. There was only a small sulphur chamber for disinfecting purposes. When a patient's outer clothing was taken off to be sent to the disinfector he had to be left in his shirt, as no other clothing or shirts were supplied. Each patient brought his blankets from the camp with him, and as no covering could be provided for him while this disinfection was taking place, it was impossible adequately to disinfect his clothing unless he was to be left naked.

As regards the washing of patients in hospital, this was entirely out of the question. Until a supply of soap was obtained by Captain Vidal's efforts from England at a later date there was no soap forthcoming. The only supply was a small quantity secured from the officers' canteen, and that was kept for the very worst cases.

### *The Work of the British Medical Officers*

It was to Major Priestley's great powers of organisation, the devoted labours and strong personality of Captain Vidal and, after his recovery, the splendid work of Captain Lauder, that gradual improvement in the conditions was due. An observation ward was instituted in Compound No. 8 and placed in charge of Captain Lauder. Major Priestley took over the treatment of typhus in the hospital, and Captain Vidal, in addition to other duties, was placed in charge of the surgical ward. Major Priestley at length obtained permission to collect, and he did collect, all the British typhus patients in one bungalow of that compound. He secured for his patients what bedding, hospital clothing, urinals, etc., he could, as these filtered daily from the hands of the Germans outside into the store-room. He arranged that the milk and the soup should arrive in special vessels before the bungalow; he obtained for each patient about three cupfuls of milk per day, and for the convalescents a thin soup and some white rolls. Clothing, beds, and bedding were gradually collected, so that the patients could at last be put into clean clothes, and their own were disinfected in a movable steam disinfector that after a time was working. As the cases decreased in number the appalling overcrowding of the hospital in the beginning at length disappeared.

In all this work Major Priestley, Captain Vidal, and Captain Lauder were splendidly supported by the many English prisoners who volunteered as nurses. Many of these devoted men caught the infection and died of the fever.

### *German Doctor awarded the Iron Cross for English Doctors' Services*

On one occasion only during the whole course of the epidemic did Dr. Aschenbach enter the hospital or even the camp. His visit took place about four weeks after Major Priestley's arrival, and after some kind of order had been evolved. He came attired in a complete suit of protected clothing, including a mask and rubber gloves. His inspection was brief and rapid.

For his services in combating the epidemic Dr. Aschenbach, the Committee understand, has been awarded the Iron Cross.

Some of the German guards outside the camp were infected by prisoners to whom, contrary to orders, they persisted in selling things. These men were placed by the Germans in a hospital outside the camp, and one of the German medical staff, an Alsatian at it happened, was sent to attend them. At a later stage in the outbreak this young man came to the hospital, but simply to take

bacteriological specimens for research work at Magdeburg. He helped in no way.

With these exceptions no visit was paid to the camp during the whole outbreak by any member of the German medical service.

### *Brutality of Wittenberg Townspeople*

The dead were buried in a cemetery formed out of a part of the camp. The Germans sent in a certain number of coffins every day into which the bodies of the dead were put and carried out by their comrades through a gate in the barbed wire. There was not sufficient room for burial of so many, and the coffins were piled one upon another, but the Committee do not think there was any special danger in the arrangement. What the prisoners found hardest to bear in this matter were the jeers with which the coffins were frequently greeted by the inhabitants of Wittenberg, who stood outside the wire and were permitted to insult their dead.

### *Dearth of Medical Apparatus*

During the first two months the typhus was hæmorrhagic typhus; it was of a milder type later on.

There were between 250 and 300 English cases, and there were 60 deaths amongst them. The deaths amongst the French and the Russians were, of course, much greater in number. The medical officers and nursing orderlies suffered the most severely; the mortality among them was high.

The cases of post-typhus gangrene were very numerous, largely the result, in all probability, of the inadequate heating of the wards at night, and, as above stated, of insufficient covering.

It was in the earlier days often necessary to discharge the patients from hospital before they were fit to be removed. Some were hardly able to walk, but it was essential to make room for fresh patients, whose need was greater.

In many cases these men had to go back to their barrack-room and lie on the bare floor, as no fresh beds or mattresses were provided for a long time, and the mattresses taken by them into the hospital had to be destroyed owing to the state in which they were.

Captain Vidal says that the conditions were thoroughly realised by the German authorities without any effort being made by them to bring about an improvement. Representations, usually through the French and Russian doctors owing to the marked hostility which was always manifested towards the English by the camp authorities, were again and again addressed to the senior medical officer, but usually without result.

After the middle of April, however, beds and clothing were, as above appears, gradually obtained for the hospital, and as the weather became warmer the cases rapidly decreased in number. With the decrease in the patients, the supplies became adequate, so that now every patient in the Wittenberg hospital, whatever be his ailment, has a bed and proper hospital clothing.

The last English typhus case occurred in the middle of May; the last Russian case in July.

By the end of July all cases were convalescent except those suffering from post-typhus gangrene.

During the epidemic an adequate steriliser for clothes was built outside the camp by the Germans, but the work was not pressed, and it was not ready for use until a fortnight after the last case of typhus occurred amongst the British. Its presence there now will, however, probably prevent any recurrence of the epidemic.

In May also several new hospital bungalows were built behind the wire entanglements, which were then moved back so as to surround them.

Each of these bungalows has three stoves, and in them beds are provided with wood-shaving mattresses, sheets, blankets, and pillows.

Unfortunately the epidemic was over before these bungalows became available.

### *Responsibility of the German Authorities*

As is obvious from this report, the conditions of the camp were such that it was not possible for the American Ambassador or his staff to visit it until after many months. It was, however, visited by Mr. Lithgow-Osborne on the 29th of October, and by Mr. Gerard himself and Mr. Russell on the 8th of November, and their reports are on record.

All accounts before the Committee testify to the great further improvements in the camp and its management effected by the Germans as a result of these visits.

The Committee fully recognise that at the beginning of the war when the sudden, and it may have been unexpected, rush of Russian prisoners overwhelmed the authorities, every allowance must be made for defects of all kind in prison camps, many of them hastily improvised. They have accordingly looked in every direction to see whether any justification or excuse can be suggested for the treatment to which these Wittenberg prisoners were subjected during the period of their visitations. They can find none.

Outside the camp the Committee can discover no indication of any scarcity either of food or of medical or surgical appliances

which could account for the failure of the German authorities to supply their sick prisoners with a sufficiency of both.

At the Kronprinz Hospital and at the Elbarfin Hospital as early as February the supply of medical requisites was adequate.

As has been stated, the medical officers in the camp were throughout the epidemic amply provided with food at an extremely moderate price and apparently without difficulty. After the outbreak had spent itself and the German guards had returned to the camp, Major Priestley and Captain Vidal were on several occasions allowed to visit the town of Wittenberg under escort, and even during that period they found displayed there abundant supplies of every requisite.

Yet for months the plague-stricken camp was starved of the barest necessaries of existence and of the simplest drugs, and was not even provided with surgical dressings for the patients' wounds.

### *Habitual Cruelty of the German Staff*

The Committee are therefore compelled to look elsewhere for an explanation of the criminal neglect of which, as it seems to them, the German authorities were guilty. And they find it in the history of the administration of the Wittenberg Camp from the very commencement. Incredible as it may seem, the action of the officers and guards in precipitately deserting the camp and thenceforth controlling its caged inmates with loaded rifles from the outside, was only in keeping with the methods and conduct of these men throughout.

The cruelty of the administration at Wittenberg Camp from the very commencement has become notorious. Savage dogs were habitually employed to terrorise the prisoners; flogging with a rubber whip was frequent; men were struck with little or no provocation, and were tied to posts with their arms above their heads for hours. Captain Lauder reports that many of these men went so far as to look upon the typhus, with all its horrors, as a godsend; they preferred it to the presence of the German guards.

And the callousness during the outbreak even of so prominent an officer as Dr. Aschenbach is illustrated by an incident related by Captain Lauder. Shortly after their arrival at the camp, Major Fry, with Captain Lauder, was begging Dr. Aschenbach, standing outside the entanglements, for some medical requisite urgently required. One of his staff with Dr. Aschenbach was apparently favourably inclined towards the request, but it was curtly refused by Dr. Aschenbach, who turned away with the words "Schweine Engländer."

To the Committee an incident like that, with all that it implies, speaks volumes.

The effects of such methods as have been described were manifest even on 29th October 1915, when, as has been stated, Mr. Lithgow-Osborne visited the camp. In his report of that visit, after remarking that the authorities of the camp regard their prisoners as criminals whom fear alone keeps obedient, Mr. Osborne proceeds:

"In no other camp have I found signs of fear on the part of the prisoners that what they might say to me would result in suffering to them afterwards."

And Mr. Gerard, speaking of his visit on the 8th November, says:

"The impression gained after careful examination of the camp and long conversations with the prisoners was even more unfavourable than I had been led to expect."

The Committee accordingly are forced to the conclusion that the terrible sufferings and privations of the afflicted prisoners during the period under review are directly chargeable to the deliberate cruelty and neglect of the German officials whose elementary duty it was, in the words of the Geneva Convention, to respect and take care of these men, wounded and sick as they were, without distinction of nationality, but who acted as if neither that Convention nor even the ordinary instincts of humanity had any place in their scheme of things.

The Commandant during the whole time was General von Dassel. The Committee believe that he has now been removed from a position which he always was unfitted to occupy. Dr. Aschenbach, however, remains medical officer, and while the Committee recognise that the material conditions at the camp are now not unsatisfactory, that improvement is the result of constant pressure which ought never to have been necessary, and no confidence can be felt that so long as Dr. Aschenbach is there the prisoners will have the medical care to which they are entitled. It is a serious matter, as the Committee think, that the German authorities should still retain in such a position of responsibility, and it is outrageous that they should have decorated, an officer capable of such neglect as that for which Dr. Aschenbach must one day answer.

### *Gallantry of British Medical Officers and Volunteer Orderlies*

The Committee turn to a more agreeable topic when they draw attention, if they properly may, to the splendid work of the British medical staff and orderlies during the epidemic. Major

Priestley's work has already been referred to in this report; it was beyond all praise. Captain Vidal was, in the words of one of the prisoners, the idol of the camp; and Major Priestley says of Captain Lauder that he cannot sufficiently express his admiration for his pluck and skill, and for the unobtrusive way in which he did his duty. It was he who, at the beginning, bore the brunt of the outbreak.

The Committee have seen Captain Lauder as well as the other officers, and they feel sure that he fully deserves that high tribute.

And all these officers concur in praising the splendid bearing of the orderlies. They each of them volunteered for the work; they tended prisoners of all nationalities. They all of them, with full understanding, for they were all warned, risked their lives without a thought, and many of them died at their posts. The Committee hope to be able in due course to supply His Majesty's Government with a full list of these heroic souls.

The Committee feel that every one of these officers and men as truly offered his life for the sake of others as any soldier on the battlefield, and they venture to hope that the devoted service of such of them as survive will be duly remembered at the proper time.

(Signed) Robert Younger,
*Chairman.*

(On behalf of the Government Committee on the treatment by the enemy of British Prisoners of War.)

*6th April* 1916.

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